

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING'S
POETICAL WORKS

VOL. II.



Mayou Finet.

Elizabeth Barrett Moulton-Barrett.

in early youth.

THE POETICAL WORKS
OF
ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

IN SIX VOLUMES

VOL. II

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POEMS

THE ROMAUNT OF MARGRET.

Can my affections find out nothing best,
But still and still remove?

QUARLES.

I.

I PLANT a tree whose leaf
The yew-tree leaf will suit :
But when its shade is o'er you laid,
Turn round and pluck the fruit.
Now reach my harp from off the wall
Where shines the sun aslant ;
The sun may shine and we be cold !
O hearken, loving hearts and bold,
Unto my wild romaunt.
Margret, Margret.

II

Sitteth the fair ladye
Close to the river side
Which runneth on with a merry tone
Her merry thoughts to guide :

It runneth through the trees,
It runneth by the hill,
Nathless the lady's thoughts have found
A way more pleasant still
Margret, Margret

III.

The night is in her hair
And giveth shade to shade,
And the pale moonlight on her forehead white
Like a spirit's hand is laid,
Her lips part with a smile
Instead of speakings done :
I ween, she thinketh of a voice,
Albeit uttering none.
Margret, Margret.

IV.

All little birds do sit
With heads beneath their wings .
Nature doth seem in a mystic dream,
Absorbed from her living things :
That dream by that ladye
Is certes unpartook,
For she looketh to the high cold stars
With a tender human look
Margret, Margret.

V.

The lady's shadow lies
 Upon the running river ;
It lieth no less in its quietness,
 For that which resteth never :
Most like a trusting heart
 Upon a passing faith,
Or as upon the course of life
 The steadfast doom of death.
 Margret, Margret.

VI.

The lady doth not move,
 The lady doth not dream,
Yet she seeth her shade no longer laid
 In rest upon the stream :
It shaketh without wind,
 It parteth from the tide,
It standeth upright in the cleft moonlight,
 It sitteth at her side.
 Margret, Margret.

VII.

Look in its face, ladye,
 And keep thee from thy swound ,

With a spirit bold thy pulses hold
And hear its voice's sound .
For so will sound thy voice
When thy face is to the wall,
And such will be thy face, ladye,
When the maidens work thy pall.
Margret, Margret

VIII.

“Am I not like to thee?”
The voice was calm and low,
And between each word you might have heard
The silent forests grow ;
“*The like may sway the like ,*”
By which mysterious law
Mine eyes from thine and my lips from thine
The light and breath may draw
Margret, Margret.

IX.

“My lips do need thy breath,
My lips do need thy smile,
And my pallid eyne, that light in thine
Which met the stars erewhile :
Yet go with light and life
If that thou lovest one

In all the earth who loveth thee
As truly as the sun,
Margret, Margret."

X.

Her cheek had waxèd white
Like cloud at fall of snow ;
Then like to one at set of sun,
It waxèd red alsò ;
For love's name maketh bold
As if the loved were near :
And then she sighed the deep long sigh
Which cometh after fear.
Margret, Margret.

XI.

"Now, sooth, I fear thee not—
Shall never fear thee now !"
(And a noble sight was the sudden light
Which lit her lifted brow)
"Can earth be dry of streams,
Or hearts of love ?" she said ;
"Who doubteth love, can know not love :
He is already dead."
Margret, Margret.

XII.

“I have” . . . and here her lips
Some word in pause did keep,
And gave the while a quiet smile
As if they paused in sleep,—
“I have . . . a brother dear,
A knight of knightly fame !
I broidered him a knightly scarf
With letters of my name
Margret, Margret.

XIII.

“I fed his grey goshawk,
I kissed his fierce bloodhound,
I sate at home when he might come
And caught his horn’s far sound :
I sang him hunter’s songs,
I poured him the red wine,
He looked across the cup and said,
I love thee, sister mine”
Margret, Margret.

XIV

IT trembled on the grass
With a low, shadowy laughter ;

The sounding river which rolled, for ever
 Stood dumb and stagnant after :
 “ Brave knight thy brother is !
 But better loveth he
Thy chaliced wine than thy chaunted song,
 And better both than thee,
 Margret, Margret.”

XV

The lady did not heed
 The river's silence while
Her own thoughts still ran at their will,
 And calm was still her smile.
 “ My little sister wears
 The look our mother wore ·
I smooth her locks with a golden comb,
 I bless her evermore.”
 Margret, Margret.

XVI

“ I gave her my first bird
 When first my voice it knew ;
I made her share my posies rare
 And told her where they grew :
I taught her God's dear name
 With prayer and praise to tell,

She looked from heaven into my face
And said, *I love thee well.*"

Margret, Margret.

XVII.

IT trembled on the grass
With a low, shadowy laughter ;
You could see each bird as it woke and stared
Through the shrivelled foliage after.
"Fair child thy sister is '
But better loveth she
Thy golden comb than thy gathered flowers,
And better both than thee,
Margret, Margret."

XVIII.

Thy lady did not heed
The withering on the bough ;
Still calm her smile albeit the while
A little pale her brow :
"I have a father old,
The lord of ancient halls ;
An hundred friends are in his court
Yet only me he calls.
Margret, Margret.

XIX.

“An hundied knights are in his court
Yet read I by his knee ;
And when foith they go to the touney-show
I rise not up to see :
’T is a weary book to read,
My tryst’s at set of sun,
But loving and dear beneath the stars
Is his blessing when I’ve done.”
Margret, Margret.

XX.

IT trembled on the grass
With a low, shadowy laughter ;
And moon and star though bright and far
Did shrink and darken after.
“High lord thy father is !
But better loveth he
His ancient halls than his hundred friends,
His ancient halls, than thee,
Margret, Margret.”

XXI.

The lady did not heed
That the far stars did fail ;

Still calm her smile, albeit the while . .

Nay, but she is not pale !

“I have more than a friend

Across the mountains dim .

No other's voice is soft to me,

Unless it nameth *him*.”

Margret, Margret.

XXII.

“Though louder beats my heart,

I know his tread again,

And his fair plume aye, unless turned away,

For the tears do blind me then :

We brake no gold, a sign

Of stronger faith to be,

But I wear his last look in my soul,

Which said, *I love but thee !*”

Margret, Margret.

XXIII.

IT trembled on the grass

With a low, shadowy laughter ;

And the wind did toll, as a passing soul

Were sped by church-bell after ;

And shadows, 'stead of light,

Fell from the stars above,

In flakes of darkness on her face
Still bright with trusting love
Margret, Margret.

XXIV.

“He *loved* but only thee !
That love is transient too.
The wild hawk’s bill doth dabble still
I’ the mouth that vowed thee true :
Will he open his dull eyes
When tears fall on his brow ?
Behold, the death-worm to his heart
Is a nearer thing than *thou*,
Margret, Margret.”

XXV.

Her face was on the ground—
None saw the agony ;
But the men at sea did that night agree
They heard a drowning cry .
And when the morning brake,
Fast rolled the river’s tide,
With the green trees waving overhead
And a white corse laid beside.
Margret, Margret.

XXVI.

A knight's bloodhound and he
The funeral watch did keep ;
With a thought o' the chase he stroked its face
As it howled to see him weep.
A fair child kissed the dead,
But shrank before its cold.
And alone yet proudly in his hall
Did stand a baron old
Margret, Margret.

XXVII.

Hang up my harp again !
I have no voice for song
Not song but wail, and mourners pale,
Not bards, to love belong.
O failing human love !
O light, by darkness known !
O false, the while thou treadest earth !
O deaf beneath the stone !
Margret, Margret.

ISOBEL'S CHILD.

—so find we profit,
By losing of our prayers.

SHAKESPEARE.

I.

To rest the weary nurse has gone :
An eight-day watch had watchèd she,
Still rocking beneath sun and moon
The baby on her knee,
Till Isobel its mother said
“The fever waneth—wend to bed,
For now the watch comes round to me.”

II.

Then wearily the nurse did throw
Her pallet in the darkest place
Of that sick room, and slept and dreamed :
For, as the gusty wind did blow
The night-lamp's flare across her face,
She saw or seemed to see, but dreamed,
That the poplars tall on the opposite hill,

The seven tall poplars on the hill,
Did clasp the setting sun until
His rays dropped from him, pined and still
 As blossoms in frost,
Till he waned and paled, so weirdly crossed,
To the colour of moonlight which doth pass
Over the dank ridged churchyard grass.
The poplars held the sun, and he
The eyes of the nurse that they should not see
—Not for a moment, the babe on her knee,
Though she shuddered to feel that it grew to be
Too chill, and lay too heavily

III.

She only dreamed ; for all the while
 'T was Lady Isobel that kept
 The little baby : and it slept
Fast, warm, as if its mother's smile,
Laden with love's dewy weight,
And red as rose of Harpocrate
Dropt upon its eyelids, pressed
Lashes to cheek in a sealed rest.

IV.

And more and more smiled Isobel
To see the baby sleep so well—

She knew not that she smiled.
 Against the lattice, dull and wild
 Drive the heavy droning drops,
 Drop by drop, the sound being one ;
 As momentarily time's segments fall
 On the ear of God, who hears through all
 Eternity's unbroken monotone .
 And more and more smiled Isobel
 To see the baby sleep so well—
 She knew not that she smiled.
 The wind in intermission stops
 Down in the beechen forest,
 Then cries aloud
 As one at the sorest,
 Self-stung, self-driven,
 And rises up to its very tops,
 Stiffening erect the branches bowed,
 Dilating with a tempest-soul
 The trees that with their dark hands break
 Through their own outline, and heavy roll
 Shadows as massive as clouds in heaven
 Across the castle lake
 And more and more smiled Isobel
 To see the baby sleep so well ;
 She knew not that she smiled ;
 She knew not that the storm was wild ;

Through the uproar drear she could not hear
The castle clock which struck anear—
She heard the low, light breathing of her child.

v.

O sight for wondering look!
While the external nature broke
Into such abandonment,
While the very mist, heart-rent
By the lightning, seemed to eddy
Against nature, with a din,—
A sense of silence and of steady
Natural calm appeared to come
From things without, and enter in
The human creature's room.

vi.

So motionless she sate,
The babe asleep upon her knees,
You might have dreamed their souls had gone
Away to things inanimate,
In such to live, in such to moan ;
And that their bodies had ta'en back,
In mystic change, all silences
That cross the sky in cloudy rack,

Or dwell beneath the reedy ground
In waters safe from their own sound :

Only she wore
The deepening smile I named before,
And *that* a deepening love expressed ;
And who at once can love and rest ?

VII.

In sooth the smile that then was keeping
Watch upon the baby sleeping,

Floated with its tender light
Downward, from the drooping eyes,
Upward, from the lips apart,

Over cheeks which had grown white
With an eight-day weeping :
All smiles come in such a wise

Where tears shall fall or have of old—
Like northern lights that fill the heart
Of heaven in sign of cold

VIII

Motionless she sate.
Her hair had fallen by its weight
On each side of her smile and lay
Very blackly on the arm

Where the baby nestled warm,
Pale as baby carved in stone
Seen by glimpses of the moon
Up a dark cathedral aisle ·
But, through the storm, no moonbeam fell
Upon the child of Isobel—
Perhaps you saw it by the ray
Alone of her still smile.

IX.

A solemn thing it is to me
To look upon a babe that sleeps
Wearing in its spirit-deeps
The undeveloped mystery
Of our Adam's taint and woe,
Which, when they developed be,
Will not let it slumber so ,
Lying new in life beneath
The shadow of the coming death,
With that soft, low, quiet breath,
As if it felt the sun ;
Knowing all things by their 'blooms,
Not their roots, yea, sun and sky
Only by the warmth that comes
Out of each, earth only by
The pleasant hues that o'er it run,

And human love by drops of sweet
 White nourishment still hanging round
 The little mouth so slumber-bound :
 All which broken sentiency
 And conclusion incomplete,
 Will gather and unite and climb
 To an immortality
 Good or evil, each sublime,
 Through life and death to life again
 O little lids, now folded fast,
 Must ye learn to drop at last
 Our large and burning tears ?
 O warm quick body, must thou lie,
 When the time comes round to die,
 Still from all the whirl of years,
 Bare of all the joy and pain ?
 O small frail being, wilt thou stand
 At God's right hand,
 Lifting up those sleeping eyes
 Dilated by great destinies,
 To an endless waking ? thrones and seraphim.
 Through the long ranks of their solemnities,
 Sunning thee with calm looks of Heaven's surprise,
 But thine alone on Him ?
 Or else, self-willed, to tread the Godless place,
 (God keep thy will !) feel thine own energies

Cold, strong, objectless, like a dead man's clasp,
The sleepless deathless life within thee grasp,—
While myriad faces, like one changeless face,
With woe *not love's*, shall glass thee everywhere
And overcome thee with thine own despair ?

X.

More soft, less solemn images
Drifted o'er the lady's heart
 Silently as snow.
She had seen eight days depart
Hour by hour, on bended knees,
 With pale-wrung hands and prayings low
And broken, through which came the sound
Of tears that fell against the ground,
Making sad stops.—“Dear Lord, dear Lord !”
She still had prayed, (the heavenly word
Broken by an earthly sigh)
—“Thou who didst not erst deny
The mother-joy to Mary mild,
Blessèd in the blessèd child
Which hearkened in meek babyhood
Her cradle-hymn, albeit used
To all that music interfused
In breasts of angels high and good !
Oh, take not, Lord, my babe away—

Oh, take not to thy songful heaven
 The pretty baby thou hast given,
 Or ere that I have seen him play
 Around his father's knees and known
 That *he* knew how my love has gone
 From all the world to him.
 Think, God among the cherubim,
 How I shall shiver every day
 In thy June sunshine, knowing where
 The grave-grass keeps it from his fair
 Still cheeks and feel, at every tread,
 His little body, which is dead
 And hidden in thy turfy fold,
 Doth make thy whole warm earth a-cold !
 O God, I am so young, so young—

I am not used to tears at nights
 Instead of slumber—not to prayer
 With sobbing lips and hands out-wrung !
 Thou knowest all my prayings were

‘I bless thee, God, for past delights—
 Thank God !’ I am not used to bear
 Hard thoughts of death ; the earth doth cover
 No face from me of friend or lover :
 And must the first who teaches me
 The form of shrouds and funerals, be
 Mine own first-born beloved ? he

Who taught me first this mother-love?
Dear Lord who spreadest out above
Thy loving, transpierced hands to meet
All lifted hearts with blessing sweet,—
Pierce not my heart, my tender heart
Thou madest tender! Thou who art
So happy in thy heaven alway,
Take not mine only bliss away!"

XI

She so had prayed and God, who hears
Through seraph-songs the sound of tears
From that belovèd babe had ta'en
The fever and the beating pain
And more and more smiled Isobel
To see the baby sleep so well,
 (She knew not that she smiled, I wis)
Until the pleasant gradual thought
Which near her heart the smile enwrought,
Now soft and slow, itself did seem
To float along a happy dream,
 Beyond it into speech like this.

XII.

"I prayed for thee, my little child,
And God has heard my prayer!"

And when thy babyhood is gone,
 We two together undefiled
 By men's repinings, will kneel down
 Upon His earth which will be fair
 (Not covering thee, sweet !) to us twain,
 And give Him thankful praise."

XIII.

Dully and wildy drives the rain :
 Against the lattices drives the rain.

XIV.

"I thank Him now, that I can think
 Of those same future days,
 Nor from the harmless image shrink
 Of what I there might see—
 Strange babies on their mothers' knee,
 Whose innocent soft faces might
 From off mine eyelids strike the light,
 With looks not meant for me !"

XV.

Gustily blows the wind through the rain,
 As against the lattices drives the rain.

XVI

“ But now, O baby mine, together,
We turn this hope of ours again
To many an hour of summer weather,
When we shall sit and intertwine
Our spirits, and instruct each other
In the pure loves of child and mother !
Two human loves make one divine.”

XVII.

The thunder tears through the wind and the rain,
As full on the lattices drives the rain.

XVIII.

“ My little child, what wilt thou choose ?
Now let me look at thee and ponder.
What gladness, from the gladnesses
Futurity is spreading under
Thy gladsome sight ? Beneath the trees
Wilt thou lean all day, and lose
Thy spirit with the river seen
Intermittently between
The winding beechen alleys,—
Half in labour, half repose,
Like a shepherd keeping sheep,

Thou, with only thoughts to keep
Which never a bound will overpass,
And which are innocent as those
That feed among Arcadian valleys
Upon the dewy grass?"

XIX.

The large white owl that with age is blind,
That hath sate for years in the old tree hollow,
Is carried away in a gust of wind ;
His wings could bear him not as fast
As he goeth now the lattice past ;
He is borne by the winds, the rains do follow
His white wings to the blast outflowing,
He hooteth in going,
And still, in the lightnings, coldly glitter
His round unblinking eyes

XX

"Or, baby, wilt thou think it fitter
To be eloquent and wise,
One upon whose lips the air
Turns to solemn verities
For men to breathe anew, and win
A deeper-seated life within ?

Wilt be a philosopher,
By whose voice the earth and skies
Shall speak to the unborn ?
Or a poet, broadly spreading
The golden immortalities
Of thy soul on nature's lorn
And pool of such, them all to guard
From their decay,—beneath thy treading,
Earth's flowers recovering hues of Eden,—
And stars, drawn downward by thy looks,
To shine ascendant in thy books ?”

XXI

The tame hawk in the castle-yard,
How it screams to the lightning, with its wet
Jagged plumes overhanging the parapet !
And at the lady's door the hound
Scratches with a crying sound.

XXII.

“ But, O my babe, thy lids are laid
Close, fast upon thy cheek,
And not a dream of power and sheen
Can make a passage up between ;
Thy heart is of thy mother's made,
Thy looks are very meek,

And it will be their chosen place
 To rest on some beloved face,
 As these on thine, and let the noise
 Of the whole world go on nor drown
 The tender silence of thy joys ·
 Or when that silence shall have grown
 Too tender for itself, the same
 Yearning for sound,—to look above
 And utter its one meaning, LOVE,
 That *He* may hear *His* name."

XXIII.

No wind, no rain, no thunder !
 The waters had trickled not slowly,
 The thunder was not spent
 Nor the wind near finishing ,
 Who would have said that the storm was
 diminishing ?
 No wind, no rain, no thunder !
 Their noises dropped asunder
 From the earth and the firmament,
 From the towers and the lattices,
 Abrupt and echoless
 As ripe fruits on the ground unshaken wholly
 As life in death.
 And sudden and solemn the silence fell,

Startling the heart of Isobel

As the tempest could not :

Against the door went panting the breath

Of the lady's hound whose cry was still,

And she, constrained howe'er she would not,

Lifted her eyes and saw the moon

Looking out of heaven alone

Upon the poplared hill,—

A calm of God, made visible

That men might bless it at their will.

XXIV.

The moonshine on the baby's face

Falleth clear and cold :

The mother's looks have fallen back

To the same place :

Because no moon with silver rack,

Nor broad sunrise in jasper skies

Has power to hold

Our loving eyes,

Which still revert, as ever must

Wonder and Hope, to gaze on the dust.

XXV.

The moonshine on the baby's face

Cold and clear remaineth ,

The mother's looks do shrink away,—
The mother's looks return to stay,
 As charmed by what paineth :
Is any glamour in the case ?
 Is it dream, or is it sight ?
Hath the change upon the wild
 Elements that sign the night,
Passed upon the child ?
 It is not dream, but sight.

XXVI

The babe has awakened from sleep
 And unto the gaze of its mother,
 Bent over it, lifted another—
 Not the baby-looks that go
 Unaimingly to and fro,
But an earnest gazing deep
Such as soul gives soul at length
 When by work and wail of years
It winneth a solemn strength
 And mourneth as it wears.
A strong man could not brook,
 With pulse unhurried by fears,
To meet that baby's look
 O'erglazed by manhood's tears,
The tears of a man full grown,

With a power to wring our own,
In the eyes all undefiled
Of a little three-months' child—
To see that babe-brow wrought
By the witnessing of thought
 To judgment's prodigy,
And the small soft mouth unweaned,
By mother's kiss o'erleaned,
(Putting the sound of loving
Where no sound else was moving
 Except the speechless cry)
Quickened to mind's expression,
Shaped to articulation,
Yea, uttering words, yea, naming woe,
 In tones that with it strangely went
 Because so baby-innocent,
As the child spake out to the mother, so —

XXVII.

“O mother, mother, loose thy prayer!
 Christ's name hath made it strong.
It bindeth me, it holdeth me
With its most loving cruelty,
 From floating my new soul along
 The happy heavenly air.
It bindeth me, it holdeth me

In all this dark, upon this dull
 Low earth, by only weepers trod.
 It bindeth me, it holdeth me !
 Mine angel looketh sorrowful
 Upon the face of God.*

XXVIII.

“Mother, mother, can I dream
 Beneath your earthly trees?
 I had a vision and a gleam,
 I heard a sound more sweet than these
 When rippled by the wind ·
 Did you see the Dove with wings
 Bathed in golden glisterings
 From a sunless light behind,
 Dropping on me from the sky,
 Soft as mother's kiss, until
 I seemed to leap and yet was still?
 Saw you how His love-large eye
 Looked upon me mystic calms,
 Till the power of His divine
 Vision was indrawn to mine?

For I say unto you that in Heaven their angels do always behold
 the face of my Father which is in Heaven — *Matt.* xviii. 10.

XXIX.

“ Oh, the dream within the dream !
 I saw celestial places even.
Oh, the vistas of high palms
 Making finites of delight
 Through the heavenly infinite,
Lifting up their green still tops
 To the heaven of heaven !
Oh, the sweet life-tree that drops
Shade like light across the river
Glorified in its for-ever
 Flowing from the Throne !
Oh, the shining holinesses
Of the thousand, thousand faces
 God-sunned by the thronèd ONE,
And made intense with such a love
That, though I saw them turned above,
Each loving seemed for also me !
And, oh, the Unspeakable, the HE,
The manifest in secrecies
 Yet of mine own heart partaker
With the overcoming look
Of One who hath been once forsook
 And blesseth the forsaker !
Mother, mother, let me go

Toward the Face that looketh so !
 Through the mystic wingèd Four
 Whose are inward, outward eyes
 Dark with light of mysteries
 And the restless evermore
 'Holy, holy, holy,'—through
 The sevenfold Lamps that burn in view
 Of cherubim and seraphim,—
 Through the four-and-twenty crowned
 Stately elders white around,
 Suffer me to go to Him !

XXX.

"Is your wisdom very wise,
 Mother, on the narrow earth,
 Very happy, very worth
 That I should stay to learn ?
 Are these air-corrupting sighs
 Fashioned by unlearnèd breath ?
 Do the students' lamps that burn
 All night, illumine death ?
 Mother, albeit this be so,
 Loose thy prayer and let me go
 Where that bright chief angel stands
 Apart from all his brother bands,

Too glad for smiling, having bent
In angelic wilderment
O'er the depths of God, and brought
Reeling thence one only thought
To fill his own eternity.
He the teacher is for me—
He can teach what I would know—
Mother, mother, let me go !

XXXI.

“Can your poet make an Eden
No winter will undo,
And light a starry fire while heeding
His hearth's is burning too ?
Drown in music the earth's din,
And keep his own wild soul within
The law of his own harmony ?
Mother, albeit this be so,
Let me to my heaven go !
A little harp me waits thereby,
A harp whose strings are golden all
And tuned to music spherical,
Hanging on the green life-tree
Where no willows ever be.
Shall I miss that harp of mine ?

Mother, no !—the Eye divine
 Turned upon it, makes it shine ;
 And when I touch it, poems sweet
 Like separate souls shall fly from it,
 Each to the immortal fyttē.
 We shall all be poets there,
 Gazing on the chiefest Fair.

XXXII.

“Love ! earth’s love ! and *can* we love
 Fixedly where all things move ?
 Can the sinning love each other ?

 Mother, mother,
 I tremble in thy close embrace,
 I feel thy tears adown my face,
 Thy prayers do keep me out of bliss—
 O dreary earthly love !
 Loose thy prayer and let me go
 To the place which loving is
 Yet not sad ; and when is given
 Escape to *thee* from this below,
 Thou shalt behold me that I wait
 For thee beside the happy Gate,
 And silence shall be up in heaven
 To hear our greeting kiss.”

XXXIII.

The nurse awakes in the morning sun,
And starts to see beside her bed
The lady with a grandeur spread
Like pathos o'er her face, as one
God-satisfied and earth-undone ;
The babe upon her arm was dead :
And the nurse could utter forth no cry,—
She was awed by the calm in the mother's eye.

XXXIV.

“Wake, nurse !” the lady said ;
“*We* are waking—he and I—
I, on earth, and he, in sky :
And thou must help me to o'erlay
With garment white this little clay
Which needs no more our lullaby.

XXXV.

“I changed the cruel prayer I made,
And bowed my meekened face, and prayed
That God would do His will ; and thus
He did it, nurse ! He parted us :
And His sun shows victorious
The dead calm face,—and *I* am calm,
And Heaven is hearkening a new psalm.

XXXVI.

“This earthly noise is too anear,
Too loud, and will not let me hear
The little harp. My death will soon
Make silence.”

And a sense of tune,
A satisfied love meanwhile
Which nothing earthly could despoil,
Sang on within her soul.

XXXVII.

Oh you,
Earth's tender and impassioned few,
Take courage to entrust your love
To Him so named who guards above
Its ends and shall fulfil
Breaking the narrow prayers that may
Befit your narrow hearts, away
In His broad, loving will.

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE.

I.

A KNIGHT of gallant deeds
 And a young page at his side,
 From the holy war in Palestine
 Did slow and thoughtful ride,
 As each were a palmer and told for beads
 The dew of the eventide.

II.

“O young page,” said the knight,
 “A noble page art thou !
 Thou fearest not to steep in blood
 The curls upon thy brow ;
 And once in the tent, and twice in the fight,
 Didst ward me a mortal blow.”

III

“O brave knight,” said the page,
 “Or ere we hither came,
 We talked in tent, we talked in field,

Of the bloody battle-game ;
But here, below this greenwood bough,
I cannot speak the same.

IV.

“ Our troop is far behind,
The woodland calm is new ;
Our steeds, with slow grass-muffled hoofs,
Tread deep the shadows through ;
And, in my mind, some blessing kind
Is dropping with the dew.

V.

“ The woodland calm is pure—
I cannot choose but have
A thought from these, o’ the beechen-trees,
Which in our England wave,
And of the little finches fine
Which sang there while in Palestine
The warrior-hilt we drave.

VI.

“ Methinks, a moment gone,
I heard my mother pray !
I heard, sir knight, the prayer for me

Wherein she passed away ;
And I know the heavens are leaning down
To hear what I shall say."

VII.

The page spake calm and high,
As of no mean degree ;
Perhaps he felt in nature's broad
Full heart, his own was free :
And the knight looked up to his lifted eye,
Then answered smilingly—

VIII.

"Sir page, I pray your grace !
Certes, I meant not so
To cross your pastoral mood, sir page,
With the crook of the battle-bow ;
But a knight may speak of a lady's face,
I ween, in any mood or place,
If the grasses die or grow.

IX.

And this I meant to say—
My lady's face shall shine
As ladies' faces use, to greet

My page from Palestine;
Or, speak she fair or prank she gay,
She is no lady of mine.

X.

“And this I meant to fear—
Her bower may suit thee ill;
For, sooth, in that same field and tent,
Thy *talk* was somewhat still:
And fitter thy hand for my knightly spear
Than thy tongue for my lady’s will !”

XI.

Slowly and thankfully
The young page bowed his head;
His large eyes seemed to muse a smile,
Until he blushed instead,
And no lady in her bower, *pardie*,
Could blush more sudden red:
“Sir Knight,—thy lady’s bower to me
Is suited well,” he said.

XII.

Beati, beati, mortui!

From the convent on the sea,
One mile off, or scarce so nigh,
Swells the dirge as clear and high

As if that, over brake and lea,
Bodily the wind did carry
The great altar of Saint Mary,
And the fifty tapers burning o'er it,
And the lady Abbess dead before it,
And the chanting nuns whom yesterweek
Her voice did charge and bless,—
Chanting steady, chanting meek,
Chanting with a solemn breath,
Because that they are thinking less
Upon the dead than upon death.

Beati, beati, mortui!

Now the vision in the sound
Wheelet on the wind around ;
Now it sweepeth back, away—
The uplands will not let it stay
To dark the western sun :

Mortui!—away at last,—

Or ere the page's blush is past !

And the knight heard all, and the page heard none.

XIII.

“A boon, thou noble knight,
If ever I servèd thee !

Though thou art a knight and I am a page,
Now grant a boon to me ,

And tell me sooth, if dark or bright,
If little loved or loved aright
Be the face of thy ladye."

XIV.

Gloomily looked the knight—
"As a son thou hast servèd me,
And would to none I had granted boon
Except to only thee!
For haply then I should love aright,
For then I should know if dark or bright
Were the face of my ladye.

XV.

"Yet it ill suits my knightly tongue
To grudge that granted boon,
That heavy price from heart and life
I paid in silence down;
The hand that claimed it, cleared in fine
My father's fame: I swear by mine,
That price was nobly won!"

XVI.

"Earl Walter was a brave old earl,
He was my father's friend,
And while I rode the lists at court
And little guessed the end,

My noble father in his shroud
Against a slanderer lying loud,
He rose up to defend.

XVII.

“Oh, calm below the marble grey
My father’s dust was strown !
Oh, meek above the marble grey
His image prayed alone !
The slanderer lied · the wretch was brave—
For, looking up the minster-nave,
He saw my father’s knightly glaive
Was changed from steel to stone.

XVIII.

“Earl Walter’s glaive was steel,
With a brave old hand to wear it,
And dashed the lie back in the mouth
Which lied against the godly truth
And against the knightly merit
The slanderer, ’neath the avenger’s heel,
Struck up the dagger in appeal
From stealthy lie to brutal force—
And out upon the traitor’s corse
Was yielded the true spirit.

XIX.

“I would mine hand had fought that fight
And justified my father !
I would mine heart had caught that wound
And slept beside him rather !
I think it were a better thing
Than murdered friend and marriage-ring
Forced on my life together.

XX

“Wail shook Earl Walter’s house ;
‘ His true wife shed no tear ;
She lay upon her bed as mute
As the earl did on his bier :
Till—‘ Ride, ride fast,’ she said at last,
‘ And bring the avengèd’s son anear !
Ride fast, ride free, as a dart can flee,
For white of blee with waiting for me
Is the corse in the next chambère.’

XXI.

“I came, I knelt beside her bed ;
Her calm was worse than strife :
‘ My husband, for thy father dear,
Gave freely when thou wast not here

His own and eke my life.
A boon ! Of that sweet child we make
An orphan for thy father's sake,
Make thou, for ours, a wife.'

XXII

"I said, ' My steed neighs in the court,
My bark rocks on the brine,
And the warrior's vow I am under now
To free the pilgrim's shrine ;
But fetch the ring and fetch the priest
And call that daughter of thine,
And rule she wide from my castle on Nyde
While I am in Palestine.'

XXIII.

"In the dark chambère, if the bride was fair,
Ye wis, I could not see,
But the steed thrice neighed, and the priest
fast prayed,
And wedded fast were we.
Her mother smiled upon her bed
As at its side we knelt to wed,
And the bride rose from her knee
And kissed the smile of her mother dead,
Or ever she kissed me.

XXIV.

“ My page, my page, what grieves thee so,
That the tears run down thy face ? ”—

“ Alas, alas ! mine own sistèr

Was in thy lady’s case :

But *she* laid down the silks she wore

And followed him she wed before,

Disguised as his true servitor,

To the very battle-place.”

XXV

And wept the page, but laughed the knight,

A careless laugh laughed he

“ Well done it were for thy sistèr,

But not for my ladye !

My love, so please you, shall requite

No woman, whether dark or bright,

Unwomaned if she be.”

XXVI

The page stopped weeping and smiled cold—

“ Your wisdom may declare

That womanhood is proved the best

By golden brooch and glossy vest

The mincing ladies wear ,
Yet is it proved, and was of old,
Anear as well, I dare to hold,
By truth, or by despair."

XXVII.

He smiled no more, he wept no more,
But passionate he spake—
"Oh, womanly she prayed in tent,
When none beside did wake !
Oh, womanly she paled in fight,
For one belovèd's sake !—
And her little hand, defiled with blood,
Her tender tears of womanhood
Most woman-pure did make !"

XXVIII.

—"Well done it were for thy sistèr,
Thou tellest well her tale !
But for my lady, she shall pray
I' the kirk of Nydesdale.
Not dread for me but love for me
Shall make my lady pale ,
No casque shall hide her woman's tear—
It shall have room to trickle clear
Behind her woman's veil."

XXIX

—“ But what if she mistook thy mind
And followed thee to strife,
Then kneeling did entreat thy love
As Paynims ask for life ? ”
—“ I would foigive, and evermore
Would love her as my servitor,
But little as my wife

XXX.

“ Look up—there is a small bright cloud
Alone amid the skies !
So high, so pure, and so apart,
A woman’s honour lies ”
The page looked up—the cloud was sheen—
A sadder cloud did rush, I ween,
Betwixt it and his eyes

XXXI.

Then dimly dropped his eyes away
From welkin unto hill—
Ha ! who rides there ?—the page is ‘waie,
Though the cry at his heart is still
And the page seeth all and the knight seeth none,
Though banner and spear do fleck the sun,
And the Saracens ride at will.

XXXII

He speaketh calm, he speaketh low,—

“ Ride fast, my master, ride,

Or ere within the broadening dark

The narrow shadows hide.”

“ Yea, fast, my page, I will do so,

And keep thou at my side.”

XXXIII.

“ Now nay, now nay, ride on thy way,

Thy faithful page precede.

For I must loose on saddle-bow

My battle-casque that galls, I trow,

The shoulder of my steed ;

And I must play, as I did vow,

For one in bitter need.

XXXIV.

“ Ere night I shall be near to thee,—

Now ride, my master, ride !

Ere night, as parted spirits cleave

To mortals too beloved to leave,

I shall be at thy side ”

The knight smiled free at the fantasy,

And adown the dell did ride

XXXV.

Had the knight looked up to the page's face,
No smile the word had won,
Had the knight looked up to the page's face,
I ween he had never gone :
Had the knight looked back to the page's geste,
I ween he had turned anon,
For dread was the woe in the face so young.
And wild was the silent geste that flung
Casque, sword to earth, as the boy down-sprung
And stood—alone, alone.

XXXVI.

He clenched his hands as if to hold
His soul's great agony—
“ Have I renounced my womanhood,
For wifhood unto *thee*,
And is this the last, last look of thine
That ever I shall see ?

XXXVII.

“ Yet God thee save, and mayst thou have
A lady to thy mind,
More woman-proud and half as true
As one thou leav'st behind !

And God me take with HIM to dwell—
For HIM I cannot love too well,
As I have loved my kind.”

XXXVIII.

SHE looketh up, in earth's despair,
The hopeful heavens to seek,
That little cloud still floateth there,
Whereof her loved did speak :
How bright the little cloud appears !
Her eyelids fall upon the tears,
And the tears down either cheek

XXXIX.

The tramp of hoof, the flash of steel—
The Paynims round her coming !
The sound and sight have made her calm,—
False page, but truthful woman ;
She stands amid them all unmoved .
A heart once broken by the loved
Is strong to meet the foeman.

XL.

“ Ho, Christian page ! art keeping sheep,
From pouring wine-cups resting ? ”—
“ I keep my master's noble name,
For warring, not for feasting ;

And if that here Sir Hubert were,
My master brave, my master dear,
Ye would not stay the questing ”

XLI.

“Where is thy master, scornful page,
That we may slay or bind him ? ”—
“Now search the lea and search the wood,
And see if ye can find him !
Nathless, as hath been often tried,
Your Paynim heroes faster ride
Before him than behind him.”

XLII.

“Give smother answers, lying page,
Or perish in the lying ! ”—
“I trow that if the warrior brand
Beside my foot, were in my hand,
’T were better at replying ! ”
They cursed her deep, they smote her low,
They cleft her golden ringlets through ;
The Loving is the Dying.

XLIII.

She felt the scimitar gleam down,
And met it from beneath
With smile more bright in victory

Than any sward from sheath,—
Which flashed across her lip serene,
Most like the spirit-light between
The darks of life and death.

XLIV.

Ingemisco, ingemisco !

From the convent on the sea,
Now it sweepeth solemnly,
As over wood and over lea
Bodily the wind did carry
The great altar of St Mary,
And the fifty tapers paling o'er it,
And the Lady Abbess stark before it,
And the weary nuns with hearts that faintly
Beat along their voices saintly—

Ingemisco, ingemisco !

Dirge for abbess laid in shroud
Sweepeth o'er the shroudless dead,
Page or lady, as we said,
With the dews upon her head,
All as sad if not as loud.

Ingemisco, ingemisco !

Is ever a lament begun
By any mourner under sun,
Which, ere it endeth, suits but *one*?

THE LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY.

FIRST PART

I

“ONORA, Onora,”—her mother is calling,
 She sits at the lattice and hears the dew falling
 Drop after drop from the sycamores laden
 With dew as with blossom, and calls home the maiden,
 “Night cometh, Onora.”

II.

She looks down the garden-walk caverned with trees,
 To the limes at the end where the green arbour is—
 “Some sweet thought or other may keep where it found
 her,
 While, forgot or unseen in the dreamlight around her,
 Night cometh—Onora !”

III

She looks up the forest whose alleys shoot on
Like the mute minster-aisles when the anthem is done
And the choristers sitting with faces aslant
Feel the silence to consecrate more than the chant—

“Onora, Onora !”

IV

And forward she looketh across the brown heath—
“Onora, art coming ?”—what is it she seeth ?
Nought, nought but the grey border-stone that is wist
To dilate and assume a wild shape in the mist—

“My daughter !” Then over

V

The casement she leaneth, and as she doth so
She is 'ware of her little son playing below.
“Now where is Onora ?” He hung down his head
And spake not, then answering blushed scarlet-red,—

“At the tryst with her lover.”

VI

But his mother was wroth : in a sternness quoth she,
“As thou play'st at the ball art thou playing with me ?
When we know that her lover to battle is gone,
And the saints know above that she loveth but one
And will ne'er wed another ?”

VII.

Then the boy wept aloud ; 't was a fair sight yet sad
To see the tears run down the sweet blooms he had
He stamped with his foot, said—" The saints know I lied
Because truth that is wicked is fittest to hide :

Must I utter it, mother ? "

VIII.

In his vehement childhood he hurried within
And knelt at her feet as in prayer against sin,
But a child at a prayer never sobbeth as he—
" Oh ! she sits with the nun of the brown rosary,
At nights in the ruin—

IX.

" The old convent ruin the ivy rots off,
Where the owl hoots by day and the toad is sun-proof,
Where no singing-birds build and the trees gaunt and grey
As in stormy sea-coasts appear blasted one way—
But is *this* the wind's doing ?

X

" A nun in the east wall was buried alive
Who mocked at the priest when he called her to shrive,
And shrieked such a curse, as the stone took her breath,
The old abbess fell backwards and swooned unto death
With an Ave half-spoken.

XI.

“I tried once to pass it, myself and my hound,
Till, as fearing the lash, down he shivered to ground—
A brave hound, my mother ! a brave hound, ye wot !
And the wolf thought the same with his fangs at her throat
In the pass of the Brocken.

XII.

“At dawn and at eve, mother, who sitteth there
With the brown rosary never used for a prayer ?
Stoop low, mother, low ! If we went there to see,
What an ugly great hole in that east wall must be
At dawn and at even !

XIII.

“Who meet there, my mother, at dawn and at even ?
Who meet by that wall, never looking to heaven ?
O sweetest my sister, what doeth with *thee*
The ghost of a nun with a brown rosary
And a face turned from heaven ?

XIV.

“Saint Agnes o’erwatcheth my dreams and erewhile
I have felt through mine eyelids the warmth of her smile ;
But last night, as a sadness like pity came o’er her,
She whispered— ‘ Say *two* prayers at dawn for Onora :
The Tempted is sinning ’ ”

XV.

“Onora, Onora !” they heard her not coming,
Not a step on the grass, not a voice through the gloaming ;
But her mother looked up, and she stood on the floor
Fair and still as the moonlight that came there before,
And a smile just beginning :

XVI.

It touches her lips but it dares not arise
To the height of the mystical sphere of her eyes,
And the large musing eyes, neither joyous nor sorry
Sing on like the angels in separate glory
Between clouds of amber ,

XVII.

For the hair droops in clouds amber-coloured till stirred
Into gold by the gesture that comes with a word ,
While—O soft !—her speaking is so interwound
Of the dim and the sweet, ’t is a twilight of sound
And floats through the chamber.

XVIII.

“Since thou shrivest my brother, fair mother,” said she
“I count on thy priesthood for marrying of me ,
And I know by the hills that the battle is done,
That my lover rides on, will be here with the sun,
’Neath the eyes that behold thee.”

XIX.

Her mother sat silent—too tender, I wis,
Of the smile her dead father smiled dying to kiss
But the boy started up pale with tears, passion-
wrought—

“O wicked fair sister, the hills utter nought !
If he cometh, who told thee ?”

XX.

“I know by the hills,” she resumed calm and clear,
“By the beauty upon them, that HE is anear :
Did they ever look *so* since he bade me adieu ?
Oh, love in the waking, sweet brother, is true,
As Saint Agnes in sleeping !”

XXI.

Half-ashamed and half-softened the boy did not speak,
And the blush met the lashes which fell on his cheek
She bowed down to kiss him : dear saints, did he see
Or feel on her bosom the BROWN ROSARY,
That he shrank away weeping ?

SECOND PART.

A bed. ONORA, *sleeping* Angels, *but not near.*

First Angel.

Must we stand so far, and she
So very fair?

Second Angel.

As bodies be.

First Angel

And she so mild?

Second Angel.

As spirits when

They meeken, not to God, but men

First Angel

And she so young, that I who bring
Good dreams for saintly children, might
Mistake that small soft face to-night,
And fetch her such a blessed thing
That at her waking she would weep
For childhood lost anew in sleep
How hath she sinned?

Second Angel.

In bartering love ;

God's love for man's.

First Angel.

We may reprove

The world for this, not only her .

Let me approach to breathe away

This dust o' the heart with holy air

Second Angel.

Stand off ! She sleeps, and did not pray.

First Angel.

Did none pray for her ?

Second Angel.

Ay, a child,—

Who never, playing, wept before :

While, in a mother undefiled,

Prayer goeth on in sleep, as true

And pauseless as the pulses do.

First Angel.

Then I approach

Second Angel.

It is not WILLED.

First Angel.

One word : is she redeemed ?

Second Angel

No more !

The place is filled.

[Angels *vamsh*

Evil Spirit (in a Nun's garb by the bed)

Forbear that dream—forbear that dream ! too near to
heaven it leaned

Onora (in sleep)

Nay, leave me this—but only this ! 't is but a dream,
sweet fiend !

Evil Spirit.

It is a *thought*

Onora (in sleep).

A sleeping thought—most innocent of good .
It doth the Devil no harm, sweet fiend ! it cannot if it
would.

I say in it no holy hymn, I do no holy work,
I scarcely hear the sabbath-bell that chimeth from the
kirk.

Evil Spirit.

Forbear that dream—forbear that dream !

Onora (in sleep). Nay, let me dream at least.

That far-off bell, it may be took for viol at a feast
I only walk among the fields, beneath the autumn-sun,
With my dead father, hand in hand, as I have often
done

Evil Spirit

Forbear that dream—forbear that dream !

Onora (in sleep) Nay, sweet fiend, let me go

I never more can walk with *him*, oh, never more but so !

For they have tied my father's feet beneath the kirk-
yard stone,
Oh, deep and straight ! oh, very straight ! they move at
nights alone :
And then he calleth through my dreams, he calleth
tenderly,
“ Come forth, my daughter, my beloved, and walk the
fields with me ! ”

Evil Spirit.

Forbear, that dream, or else disprove its pureness by a
sign

Onora (in sleep)

Speak on, thou shalt be satisfied, my word shall answer
thine.

I heard a bird which used to sing when I a child was
praying,

I see the poppies in the corn I used to sport away in .
What shall I do—tread down the dew and pull the
blossoms blowing ?

Or clap my wicked hands to fright the finches from the
rowan ?

Evil Spirit.

Thou shalt do something harder still. Stand up where
thou dost stand

Among the fields of Dreamland with thy father hand in
hand,

And clear and slow repeat the vow, declare its cause and
kind,

Which not to break, in sleep or wake thou bearest on
thy mind

Onora (in sleep).

I bear a vow of sinful kind, a vow for mournful cause ;
I vowed it deep, I vowed it strong, the spirits laughed
applause :

The spirits trailed along the pines low laughter like a
breeze,

While, high atween their swinging tops, the stars ap-
peared to freeze.

Evil Spirit.

More calm and free, speak out to me why such a vow
was made.

Onora (in sleep).

Because that God decreed my death and I shrank
back afraid.

Have patience, O dead father mine ! I did not fear
to die—

I wish I were a young dead child and had thy company
I wish I lay beside thy feet, a buried three-year child,
And wearing only a kiss of thine upon my lips that
smiled !

The linden-tree that covers thee might so have sha-
dowed twain,

For death itself I did not fear—'tis love that makes
the pain :

Love feareth death I was no child, I was betrothed
that day ,

I wore a troth-kiss on my lips I could not give away.

How could I bear to lie content and still beneath a
stone,

And feel mine own betrothed go by—alas ! no more
mine own—

Go leading by in wedding pomp some lovely lady brave,
With cheeks that blushed as red as rose, while mine
were white in grave ?

How could I bear to sit in heaven, on e'er so high a
throne,

And hear him say to her—to *her* ! that else he loveth
none ?

Though e'er so high I sate above, though e'er so low
he spake,

As clear as thunder I should hear the new oath he
might take,

That hers, forsooth, were heavenly eyes—ah me, while
very dim

Some heavenly eyes (indeed of heaven !) would darken
down to *him* !

Evil Spirit.

Who told thee thou wast called to death ?

Onora (in sleep)

I sate all night beside thee ·
The grey owl on the ruined wall shut both his eyes
to hide thee,
And ever he flapped his heavy wing all brokenly and
weak,
And the long grass waved against the sky, around his
gasping beak
I sate beside thee all the night, while the moonlight lay
forlorn
Strewn round us like a dead world's shroud in ghastly
fragments torn ·
And through the night, and through the hush, and
over the flapping wing,
We heard beside the Heavenly Gate the angels mur-
muring
We heard them say, "Put day to day, and count the
days to seven,
"And God will draw Onora up the golden stairs of
heaven
"And yet the Evil ones have leave that purpose to defer,
"For if she has no need of HIM, He has no need of her."

Evil Spirit.

Speak out to me, speak bold and free.

Onora (in sleep)

And then I heard thee say—

"I count upon my rosary blown the hours thou hast to
stay !

"Yet God permits us Evil ones to put by that decree,

"Since if thou hast no need of HIM, He has no need of
thee :

"And if thou wilt forgo the sight of angels, verily

"Thy true love gazing on thy face shall guess what
angels be ;

"Nor bride shall pass, save thee " . . . Alas !—my father's
hand 's a-cold,

The meadows seem .

Evil Spirit.

Forbear the dream, or let the vow be told

Onora (in sleep)

I vowed upon thy rosary brown, this string of antique
beads,

By charnel lichens overgrown, and dank among the
weeds,

This rosary brown which is thine own,—lost soul of
buried nun !

Who, lost by vow, wouldst render now all souls alike
undone,—

I vowed upon thy rosary brown,—and, till such vow
should break,

A pledge always of living days 't was hung around my
neck—

I vowed to thee on rosary (dead father, look not so !),
I would not thank God in my weal, nor seek God in my woe.

Evil Spirit.

And canst thou prove . . .

Onora (in sleep).

O love, my love ! I felt him near again !
I saw his steed on mountain-head, I heard it on the
plain !

Was this no weal for me to feel ? Is greater weal than
this ?

Yet when he came, I wept his name—and the angels
heard but *his*.

Evil Spirit

Well done, well done !

Onora (in sleep)

Ah me, the sun ! the dreamlight 'gins to pine,—
Ah me, how dread can look the Dead ! Aroint thee,
father mine !

She starteth from slumber, she sitteth upright,
And her breath comes in sobs, while she stares through
the night ;

There is nought ; the great willow, her lattice before,
Large-drawn in the moon, lieth calm on the floor .
But her hands tremble fast as their pulses and, free
From the death-clasp, close over—the BROWN ROSARY.

THIRD PART.

I

'T is a morn for a bridal, the merry bride-bell
Rings clear through the green-wood that skuts the
 chappelle,
And the priest at the altar awaiteth the bride,
And the sacristans slyly are jesting aside
 At the work shall be doing;

II.

While down through the wood rides that fair company,
The youths with the courtship, the maids with the glee,
Till the chapel-cross opens to sight, and at once
All the maids sigh demurely and think for the nonce,
 " And so endeth a wooing ! "

III

And the bride and the bridegroom are leading the way,
With his hand on her rein, and a word yet to say,
Her dropt eyelids suggest the soft answers beneath,
And the little quick smiles come and go with her breath
 When she sigheth or speaketh.

IV.

And the tender bride-mother breaks off unaware
From an Ave, to think that her daughter is fair,
Till in nearing the chapel and glancing before,
She seeth her little son stand at the door :

Is it play that he seeketh ?

V.

Is it play, when his eyes wander innocent-wild
And sublimed with a sadness unfitting a child ?
He trembles not, weeps not ; the passion is done,
And calmly he kneels in their midst, with the sun
On his head like a glory.

VI.

“ O fair-featured maids, ye are many ! ” he cried,
“ But in fairness and vileness who matcheth the bride ?
O brave-hearted youths, ye are many ! but whom
For the courage and woe can ye match with the groom
As ye see them before ye ? ”

VII.

Out spake the bride's mother, “ The vileness is thine
If thou shame thine own sister, a bride at the shrine ! ”
Out spake the bride's lover, “ The vileness be mine
If he shame mine own wife at the hearth or the shrine
And the charge be unprovèd.

VIII

“Bring the charge, prove the charge, brother ! speak it
aloud :

Let thy father and hers hear it deep in his shroud ! ”

—“ O father, thou seest, for dead eyes can see,
How she wears on her bosom a BROWN ROSARY,
O my father belovèd ! ”

IX.

Then outlaughed the bridegroom, and outlaughed withal
Both maidens and youths by the old chapel-wall .

“ So she weareth no love-gift, kind brother,” quoth he,
“ She may wear an she listeth a brown rosary,
Like a pure-hearted lady.”

X.

Then swept through the chapel the long bridal train ;
Though he spake to the bride she replied not again
On, as one in a dream, pale and stately she went
Where the altar-lights burn o’er the great sacrament,
Faint with daylight, but steady.

XI.

But her brother had passed in between them and her,
And calmly knelt down on the high-altar stair—

Of an infantine aspect so stern to the view
That the priest could not smile on the child's eyes of blue
As he would for another.

XII.

He knelt like a child marble-sculptured and white
That seems kneeling to pray on the tomb of a knight,
With a look taken up to each iris of stone
From the greatness and death where he kneeleth, but
none
From the face of a mother.

XIII.

"In your chapel, O priest, ye have wedded and shriven
Fair wives for the hearth, and fair sinners for heaven,
But this fairest my sister, ye think now to wed,
Bid her kneel where she standeth, and shrive her in-
stead:
O shrive her and wed not!"

XIV.

In tears, the bride's mother,—“Sir priest, unto thee
Would he lie, as he lied to this fair company.”
In wrath, the bride's lover,—“The lie shall be clear!
Speak it out, boy! the saints in their niches shall hear:
Be the charge proved or said not!”

XV.

'Then serene in his childhood he lifted his face,
And his voice sounded holy and fit for the place,—
“Look down from your niches, ye still saints, and see
How she wears on her bosom a BROWN ROSARY !

Is it used for the praying ?”

XVI.

The youths looked aside — to laugh there were a sin—
And the maidens' lips trembled from smiles shut within.
Quoth the priest, “Thou art wild, pretty boy ! Blessed she
Who prefers at her bridal a brown rosary

To a worldly arraying.”

XVII.

The bridegroom spake low and led onward the bride
And before the high altar they stood side by side ·
The rite-book is opened, the rite is begun,
They have knelt down together to rise up as one.

Who laughed by the altar ?

XVIII.

The maidens looked forward, the youths looked around,
The bridegroom's eye flashed from his prayer at the sound ;
And each saw the bride, as if no bride she were,
Gazing cold at the priest without gesture of prayer,
As he read from the psalter.

XIX.

The priest never knew that she did so, but still
He felt a power on him too strong for his will :
And whenever the Great Name was there to be read,
His voice sank to silence—THAT could not be said,
Or the air could not hold it.

XX.

“I have sinnèd,” quoth he, “I have sinnèd, I wot”—
And the tears ran adown his old cheeks at the thought :
They dropped fast on the book, but he read on the same,
And aye was the silence where should be the NAME,—
As the choristers told it.

XXI.

The rite-book is closed, and the rite being done
They, who knelt down together, arise up as one :
Fair riseth the bride—Oh, a fair bride is she,
But, for all (think the maidens) that brown rosary,
No saint at her praying !

XXII.

What aileth the bridegroom? He glares blank and wide ;
Then suddenly turning he kisseth the bride ;
His lips stung her with cold ; she glanced upwardly mute .
“Mine own wife,” he said, and fell stark at her foot
In the word he was saying.

XXIII.

They have lifted him up, but his head sinks away,
And his face showeth bleak in the sunshine and grey.
Leave him now where he lieth—for oh, never more
Will he kneel at an altar or stand on a floor !

Let his bride gaze upon him

XXIV.

Long and still was her gaze while they chafed him
there

And breathed in the mouth whose last life had kissed
her,

But when they stood up—only *they* ! with a start
The shriek from her soul struck her pale lips apart
She has lived, and forgone him !

XXV.

And low on his body she droppeth adown—
“Didst call me thine own wife, beloved—thine own ?
Then take thine own with thee ! thy coldness is warm
To the world’s cold without thee ! Come, keep me from
harm

In a calm of thy teaching !”

XXVI.

She looked in his face earnest-long, as in sooth
There were hope of an answer, and then kissed his
mouth,
And with head on his bosom, wept, wept bitterly,—
“Now, O God, take pity—take pity on me!
God, hear my beseeching!”

XXVII.

She was 'ware of a shadow that crossed where she lay,
She was 'ware of a presence that withered the day.
Wild she sprang to her feet,—“I surrender to *thee*
The broken vow's pledge, the accursed rosary,—
I am ready for dying!”

XXVIII

She dashed it in scorn to the marble-paved ground
Where it fell mute as snow, and a weird music-sound
Crept up, like a chill, up the aisles long and dim,—
As the fiends tried to mock at the choristers' hymn
And moaned in the trying.

FOURTH PART.

ONORA looketh listlessly adown the garden walk.

“I am weary, O my mother, of thy tender talk

I am weary of the trees a-waving to and fro,

Of the steadfast skies above, the running brooks below

All things are the same, but I,—only I am dreary,

And, mother, of my dreariness behold me very weary

“Mother, brother, pull the flowers I planted in the spring

And smiled to think I should smile more upon them
gathering

The bees will find out other flowers—oh, pull them,
dearest mine,

And carry them and carry me before Saint Agnes’ shrine”

—Whereat they pulled the summer flowers she planted
in the spring,

And her and them all mournfully to Agnes’ shrine did bring.

She looked up to the pictured saint and gently shook her
head—

“The picture is too calm for *me*—too calm for *me*,” she
said.

"The little flowers we brought with us, before it we may lay,
For those are used to look at heaven,—but *I* must turn
away,

Because no sinner under sun can dare or bear to gaze
On God's or angel's holiness, except in Jesu's face."

She spoke with passion after pause—"And were it wisely
done

If we who cannot gaze above, should walk the earth alone?
If we whose virtue is so weak should have a will so strong,
And stand blind on the rocks to choose the right path
from the wrong?

To choose perhaps a love-lit hearth, instead of love and
heaven,—

A single rose, for a rose-tree which beareth seven times
seven?

A rose that droppeth from the hand, that fadeth in the
breast,—

Until, in grieving for the worst, we learn what is the best ! "

Then breaking into tears,—“ Dear God,” she cried, “ and
must we see

All blissful things depart from us or ere we go to THEE ?
We cannot guess Thee in the wood or hear Thee in the
wind ?

Our cedars must fall round us ere we see the light behind?

Ay sooth, we feel too strong, in weal, to need thee on
that road,
But woe being come, the soul is dumb that crieth not on
‘God.’ ”

Her mother could not speak for tears ; she ever musèd
thus,

“ *The bees will find out other flowers,—but what is left for
us ?* ”

But her young brother stayed his sobs and knelt beside
her knee,

—“Thou sweetest sister in the world, hast never a word
for me ? ”

She passed her hand across his face, she pressed it on his
cheek,

So tenderly, so tenderly—she needed not to speak

The wreath which lay on shrine that day, at vespers
bloomed no more.

The woman fair who placed it there had died an hour
before.

Both perished mute for lack of root, earth’s nourishment
to reach.

O reader, breathe (the ballad saith) some sweetness
out of each !

A ROMANCE OF THE GANGES.

I.

SEVEN maidens 'neath the midnight
 Stand near the river-sea
 Whose water sweepeth white around
 The shadow of the tree ;
 The moon and earth are face to face,
 And earth is slumbering deep ;
 The wave-voice seems the voice of dreams
 That wander through her sleep :
 The river floweth on.

II.

What bring they 'neath the midnight,
 Beside the river-sea ?
 They bring the human heart wherein
 No nightly calm can be,—
 That droppeth never with the wind,
 Nor drieth with the dew
 Oh, calm in God ! thy calm is broad
 To cover spirits too.
 The river floweth on.

III

The maidens lean them over
The waters, side by side,
And shun each other's deepening eyes,
And gaze adown the tide,
For each within a little boat
A little lamp hath put,
And heaped for freight some lily's weight
Or scarlet rose half shut.
The river floweth on

IV.

Of shell of cocoa carven
Each little boat is made ;
Each carries a lamp, and carries a flower,
And carries a hope unsaid ;
And when the boat hath carried the lamp
Unquenched till out of sight,
The maiden is sure that love will endure ;
But love will fail with light.
The river floweth on.

V.

Why, all the stars are ready
To symbolize the soul,

A ROMANCE OF THE GANGES

The stars untroubled by the wind,
Unwearied as they roll ;
And yet the soul by instinct sad
Reverts to symbols low —
To that small flame, whose very name
Breathed o'er it, shakes it so !
The river floweth on

VI.

Six boats are on the river,
Seven maidens on the shore,
While still above them steadfastly
The stars shine evermore
Go, little boats, go soft and safe,
And guard the symbol spark !
The boats aright go safe and bright
Across the waters dark.
The river floweth on.

VII

The maiden Luti watcheth
Where onwardly they float :
That look in her dilating eyes
Might seem to drive her boat :
Her eyes still mark the constant fire,

And kindling unawares
That hopeful while, she lets a smile
Creep silent through her prayers
The river floweth on.

VIII.

The smile—where hath it wandered?
She riseth from her knee,
She holds her dark, wet locks away—
There is no light to see!
She cries a quick and bitter cry—
“Nuleeni, launch me thine!
We must have light abroad to-night,
For all the wreck of mine”
The river floweth on.

IX.

“I do remember watching
Beside this river-bed
When on my childish knee was leaned
My dying father’s head;
I turned mine own to keep the tears
From falling on his face:
What doth it prove when Death and Love
Choose out the self-same place?”
The river floweth on.

X.

“They say the dead are joyful
The death-change here receiving :
Who say—ah me ! who dare to say
Where joy comes to the living ?
Thy boat, Nuleen ! look not sad—
Light up the waters rather !
I weep no faithless lover where
I wept a loving father.”
The river floweth on.

XI.

“My heart foretold his falsehood
Ere my little boat grew dim ;
And though I closed mine eyes to dream
That one last dream of *him*,
They shall not now be wet to see
The shining vision go :
From earth’s cold love I look above
To the holy house of snow.”*
The river floweth on.

* The Hindoo heaven is localized on the summit of Mount Meru—one of the mountains of Himalaya or Himmaleh, which signifies, I believe, in Sanscrit, the abode of snow, winter, or coldness.

XII.

“Come thou—thou never knewest
A grief, that thou shouldst fear one !
Thou wearest still the happy look
That shines beneath a dear one :
Thy humming-bird is in the sun,*
Thy cuckoo in the grove,
And all the three broad worlds, for thee
Are full of wandering love ”
The river floweth on.

XIII.

“Why, maiden, dost thou loiter ?
What secret wouldst thou cover ?
That peepul cannot hide thy boat,
And I can guess thy lover ;
I heard thee sob his name in sleep,
It was a name I knew .
Come, little maid, be not afraid,
But let us prove him true ! ”
The river floweth on.

* Himadeva, the Indian god of love, is imagined to wander through the three worlds, accompanied by the humming-bird, cuckoo, and gentle breezes.

XIV.

The little maiden cometh,
 She cometh shy and slow ;
I ween she seeth through her lids
 They drop adown so low :
Her tresses meet her small bare feet,
 She stands and speaketh nought,
Yet blusheth red as if she said
 The name she only thought
 The river floweth on.

XV

She knelt beside the water,
 She lighted up the flame,
And o'er her youthful forehead's calm
 The fitful radiance came :—
“ Go, little boat, go soft and safe,
 And guard the symbol spark ! ”
Soft, safe doth float the little boat
 Across the waters dark.
 The river floweth on.

XVI.

Glad tears her eyes have blinded,
 The light they cannot reach ;

She turneth with that sudden smile
She learnt before her speech—
“I do not hear his voice, the tears
Have dimmed my light away,
But the symbol light will last to-night,
The love will last for aye !”
The river floweth on.

XVII.

Then Luti spake behind her,
Outspake she bitterly—
“By the symbol light that lasts to-night,
Wilt vow a vow to me?”
Nuleeni gazeth up her face,
Soft answer maketh she—
“By loves that last when lights are past,
I vow that vow to thee !”
The river floweth on.

XVIII

An earthly look had Luti
Though her voice was deep as prayer—
“The rice is gathered from the plains
To cast upon thine hair : *

* The casting of rice upon the head, and the fixing of the band or tali about the neck, are parts of the Hindoo marriage ceremonial.

But when *he* comes his marriage-band
Around thy neck to throw,
Thy bride-smile raise to meet his gaze,
And whisper,—*There is one betrays,*
 While Luti suffers woe”
The river floweth on.

XIX.

“And when in seasons after,
Thy little bright-faced son
Shall lean against thy knee and ask
What deeds his sire hath done,—
Press deeper down thy mother-smile
His glossy curls among,
View deep his pretty childish eyes,
And whisper,—*There is none denies,*
 While Luti speaks of wrong.”
The river floweth on.

XX.

Nuleeni looked in wonder,
Yet softly answered she—
“By loves that last when lights are past,
I vowed that vow to thee :
But why glads it thee that a bride-day be

By a word of *woe* defiled?
That a word of *wrong* take the cradle-song
From the ear of a sinless child ? ”
“ Why ? ” Luti said, and her laugh was dread,
And her eyes dilated wild—
“ That the fair new love may her bridegroom prove,
And the father shame the child ! ”
The river floweth on.

XXI.

“ Thou flowest still, O river,
Thou flowest 'neath the moon ;
Thy lily hath not changed a leaf,*
Thy charmed lute a tune :
He mixed his voice with thine and *his*
Was all I heard around ;
But now, beside his chosen bride,
I hear the river's sound.”
The river floweth on.

XXII.

“ I gaze upon her beauty
Through the tresses that enwreathe it ,

* The Ganges is represented as a white woman, with a water-lily in her right hand, and in her left a lute.

The light above thy wave, is hers—

My rest, alone beneath it :

Oh, give me back the dying look

My father gave thy water !

Give back—and let a little love

O'erwatch his weary daughter !”

The river floweth on.

XXIII.

“Give back !” she hath departed—

The word is wandering with her ;

And the stricken maidens hear afar

The step and cry together.

Frail symbols ? None are frail enow

For mortal joys to borrow !—

While bright doth float Nuleeni's boat,

She weepeth dark with sorrow.

The river floweth on.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY.

I

To the belfry, one by one, went the ringers from the sun,
Toll slowly
 And the oldest ringer said, "Ours is music for the dead
 When the rebecks are all done."

II.

Six abeles i' the churchyard grow on the north side in a
 row,
Toll slowly
 And the shadows of their tops rock across the little slopes
 Of the grassy graves below.

III.

On the south side and the west a small river runs in
 haste,
Toll slowly
 And, between the river flowing and the fair green trees
 a-growing,
 Do the dead lie at their rest.

IV.

On the east I sate that day, up against a willow grey;

Toll slowly

Through the rain of willow-branches I could see the low
hill-ranges

And the river on its way

V.

There I sate beneath the tree, and the bell tolled
solemnly,

Toll slowly.

While the trees' and river's voices flowed between the
solemn noises,—

Yet death seemed more loud to me.

VI.

There I read this ancient rhyme while the bell did all
the time

Toll slowly.

And the solemn knell fell in with the tale of life and sin,
Like a rhythmic fate sublime.

THE RHYME

I.

Broad the forests stood (I read) on the hills of Linteged,

Toll slowly.

And three hundred years had stood mute adown each
hoary wood,

Like a full heart having prayed.

II.

And the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang
west,

Toll slowly.

And but little thought was theirs of the silent antique
years,

In the building of their nest

III.

Down the sun dropt large and red on the towers of
Linteged,—

Toll slowly

Lance and spear upon the height, bristling strange in
fiery light,

While the castle stood in shade.

IV.

There the castle stood up black with the red sun at its
back—

Toll slowly—

Like a sullen smouldering pyre with a top that flickers fire
When the wind is on its track.

V.

And five hundred archers tall did besiege the castle
wall—

Toll slowly.

And the castle, seethed in blood, fourteen days and
nights had stood
And to-night was near its fall.

VI.

Yet thereunto, blind to doom, three months since, a
bride did come—

Toll slowly.

One who proudly trod the floors and softly whispered in
the doors,

“May good angels bless our home.”

VII.

Oh, a bride of queenly eyes, with a front of constancies ·

Toll slowly.

Oh, a bride of cordial mouth where the untired smile of
youth

Did light outward its own sighs !

VIII

'T was a Duke's fair orphan-girl, and her uncle's ward—
the Earl—

Toll slowly.

Who betrothed her twelve years old, for the sake of
dowry gold,

To his son Lord Leigh the churl.

IX.

But what time she had made good all her years of
womanhood—

Toll slowly.

Unto both these lords of Leigh spake she out right
sovrانly,

“My will runneth as my blood.

X.

“And while this same blood makes red this same right
hand’s veins,” she said—

Toll slowly—

“’T is my will, as lady free, not to wed a lord of Leigh,
But Sir Guy of Linteged ”

XI.

The old Earl he smiled smooth, then he sighed for
wilful youth—

Toll slowly.

“Good my niece, that hand withal looketh somewhat
soft and small
For so large a will, in sooth.”

XII.

She too smiled by that same sign, but her smile was cold
and fine—

Toll slowly.

“Little hand clasps muckle gold, or it were not worth
the hold
Of thy son, good uncle mine !”

XIII.

Then the young lord jerked his breath, and sware thickly
in his teeth—

Toll slowly—

“He would wed his own betrothed, an she loved him an
she loathed,
Let the life come or the death.”

XIV.

Up she rose with scornful eyes, as her father's child
might rise—

Toll slowly.

“Thy hound's blood, my lord of Leigh, stains thy knightly
heel,” quoth she,
“And he moans not where he lies :

XV.

“But a woman's will dies hard, in the hall or on the
sward”—

Toll slowly.

“By that grave, my lords, which made me orphaned girl
and dowered lady,
I deny you wife and ward!’

XVI.

Unto each she bowed her head and swept past with lofty
tread.

Toll slowly.

Ere the midnight-bell had ceased, in the chapel had the
priest
Blessed her, bride of Linteged.

XVII.

Fast and fain the bridal train along the night-storm rode
amain—

Toll slowly.

Hard the steeds of lord and serf struck their hoofs out on
the turf,
In the pauses of the rain.

XVIII.

Fast and fain the kinsmen's train along the storm pur-
sued amain—

Toll slowly.

Steed on steed-track, dashing off,—thickening, doubling,
hoof on hoof,
In the pauses of the rain.

XIX

And the bridegroom led the flight on his red-roan steed
of might—

Toll slowly.

And the bride lay on his arm, still, as if she feared no
harm,
Smiling out into the night.

XX.

“Dost thou fear?” he said at last. “Nay,” she answered
him in haste,—

Toll slowly.

“Not such death as we could find—only life with one
behind
Ride on fast as fear, ride fast!”

XXI.

Up the mountain wheeled the steed—girth to ground,
and fetlocks spread—

Toll slowly

Headlong bounds, and rocking flanks,—down he stag-
gered, down the banks,
To the towers of Linteged.

XXII.

High and low the serfs looked out, red the flambeaus
tossed about—

Toll slowly

In the courtyard rose the cry, "Live the Duchess and
Sir Guy!"

But she never heard them shout.

XXIII

On the steed she dropped her cheek, kissed his mane
and kissed his neck—

Toll slowly.

"I had happier died by thee than lived on, a Lady
Leigh,"

Were the first words she did speak.

XXIV.

But a three months' joyaunce lay 'twixt that moment
and to-day—

Toll slowly.

When five hundred archers tall stand beside the castle
wall

To recapture Duchess May.

XXV.

And the castle standeth black with the red sun at its
back—

Toll slowly.

And a fortnight's siege is done, and, except the duchess,
none

Can misdoubt the coming wrack.

XXVI.

Then the captain, young Lord Leigh, with his eyes so
grey of blee—

Toll slowly.

And thin lips that scarcely sheath the cold white gnash-
ing of his teeth,

Gnashed in smiling, absently,—

XXVII.

Cried aloud, "So goes the day, bridegroom fair of
Duchess May!"

Toll slowly

"Look thy last upon that sun! if thou seest to-morrow's
one

'T will be through a foot of clay.

XXVIII.

“Ha, fair bride! dost hear no sound save that moaning
of the hound?”

Toll slowly.

“Thou and I have parted troth, yet I keep my ven-
geance-oath,
And the other may come round.

XXIX.

“Ha! thy will is brave to dare, and thy new love past
compare”—

Toll slowly.

“Yet thine old love’s falchion brave is as strong a thing
to have,
As the will of lady fair.

XXX.

“Peck on blindly, netted dove! If a wife’s name thee
behave”—

Toll slowly—

“Thou shalt wear the same to-morrow, ere the grave has
hid the sorrow
Of thy last ill-mated love.

XXXI.

“O’er his fixed and silent mouth, thou and I will call
back troth”:

Toll slowly

“He shall altar be and priest,—and he will not cry at
least

‘I forbid you, I am loth !’

XXXII

“I will wring thy fingers pale in the gauntlet of my
mail”:

Toll slowly.

“ ‘ Little hand and muckle gold ’ close shall lie within my
hold,

As the sword did, to prevail.”

XXXIII.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang
west—

Toll slowly.

Oh, and laughed the Duchess May, and her soul did put
away

All his boasting, for a jest.

XXXIV

In her chamber did she sit, laughing low to think of it,—

Toll slowly.

“Tower is strong and will is free : thou canst boast, my
lord of Leigh,
But thou boastest little wit.”

XXXV.

In her tire-glass gazèd she, and she blushed right
womanly—

Toll slowly

She blushed half from her disdain, half her beauty was
so plain,
—“Oath for oath, my lord of Leigh !”

XXXVI.

Straight she called her maidens in—“Since ye gave me
blame herein”—

Toll slowly—

“That a bridal such as mine should lack gauds to make
it fine,
Come and shrive me from that sin.

XXXVII.

“It is three months gone to-day since I gave mine hand
away”:

Toll slowly.

“Bring the gold and bring the gem, we will keep bride-
state in them,
While we keep the foe at bay.

XXXVIII.

“On your arms I loose mine hair; comb it smooth and
crown it fair”:

Toll slowly.

“I would look in purple pall from this lattice down the
wall,
And throw scorn to one that’s there!”

XXXIX.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang
west—

Toll slowly

On the tower the castle’s lord leant in silence on his
sword,
With an anguish in his breast.

XL.

With a spirit-laden weight did he lean down passionate :

Toll slowly.

They have almost sapped the wall,—they will enter there-
withal

With no knocking at the gate.

XLI.

Then the sword he leant upon, shivered, snapped upon
the stone—

Toll slowly.

“Sword,” he thought, with inward laugh, “ill thou servest
for a staff

When thy nobler use is done !

XLII.

“Sword, thy nobler use is done ! tower is lost, and shame
begun ! ”—

Toll slowly.

“If we met them in the breach, hilt to hilt or speech to
speech,

We should die there, each for one.

XLIII.

“If we met them at the wall, we should singly, vainly
fall”—

Toll slowly

“But if *I* die here alone,—then I die who am but one,
And die nobly for them all

XLIV.

“Five true friends lie for my sake in the moat and in the
brake”—

Toll slowly

“Thirteen warriors lie at rest with a black wound in the
breast,
And not one of these will wake

XLV.

“So, no more of this shall be! heart-blood weighs too
heavily”—

Toll slowly

“And I could not sleep in grave, with the faithful and
the brave

Heaped around and over me

XLVI.

“Since young Clare a mother hath, and young Ralph a
plighted faith” —

Toll slowly

“Since my pale young sister’s cheeks blush like rose
when Ronald speaks,
Albeit never a word she saith—

XLVII

“These shall never die for me · life-blood falls too
heavily” ·

Toll slowly

“And if *I* die here apart, o’er my dead and silent heart
They shall pass out safe and free

XLVIII

“When the foe hath heard it said—‘Death holds Guy
of Linteged’”—

Toll slowly.

“That new corse new peace shall bring, and a blessed,
blessèd thing
Shall the stone be at its head.

XLIX.

“Then my friends shall pass out free, and shall bear my
memory”—

Toll slowly

“Then my foes shall sleek their pride, soothing fair my
widowed bride

Whose sole sin was love of me :

L.

“With their words all smooth and sweet, they will front
her and entreat”—

Toll slowly.

“And their purple pall will spread underneath her faint-
ing head

While her tears drop over it.

LI.

“She will weep her woman’s tears, she will pray her
woman’s prayers”—

Toll slowly.

“But her heart is young in pain, and her hopes will
spring again

By the suntime of her years.

LII.

“Ah, sweet May! ah, sweetest grief!—once I vowed
thee my belief”—

Toll slowly—

“That thy name expressed thy sweetness,—May of poets,
in completeness!

Now my May-day seemeth brief.”

LIII.

All these silent thoughts did swim o'er his eyes grown
strange and dim—

Toll slowly

Till his true men, in the place, wished they stood there
face to face

With the foe instead of him.

LIV.

“One last oath, my friends that wear faithful hearts to
do and dare!”

Toll slowly.

“Tower must fall and bride be lost—swear me service
worth the cost!”

Bold they stood around to swear.

LV.

“Each man clasp my hand and swear by the deed we
failed in there”—

Toll slowly.

“Not for vengeance, not for right, will ye strike one
blow to-night !”

Pale they stood around to swear.

LVI

“One last boon, young Ralph and Clare ! faithful hearts
to do and dare !”

Toll slowly.

“Bring that steed up from his stall, which she kissed
before you all

Guide him up the turret-stair.

LVII.

“Ye shall harness him aright, and lead upward to this
height :”

Toll slowly.

“Once in love and twice in war hath he borne me
strong and far

He shall bear me far to-night.”

LVIII.

Then his men looked to and fro, when they heard him
speaking so—

Toll slowly.

“’Las! the noble heart,” they thought, “he in sooth is
grief-distraught:

Would we stood here with the foe!”

LIX.

But a fire flashed from his eye, ’twixt their thought and
their reply—

Toll slowly.

“Have ye so much time to waste? We who ride here,
must ride fast

As we wish our foes to fly.”

LX.

They have fetched the steed with care, in the harness he
did wear—

Toll slowly.

Past the court and through the doors, across the rushes
of the floors,

But they goad him up the stair.

LXI

Then from out her bower chambère did the Duchess
May repair :

Toll slowly

“ Tell me now what is your need,” said the lady, “ of this
stéed,
That ye goad him up the stair ? ”

LXII.

Calm she stood ; unbodkined through, fell her dark hair
to her shoe :

Toll slowly

And the smile upon her face, ere she left the tiring-
glass,
Had not time enough to go.

LXIII.

Get thee back, sweet Duchess May ! hope is gone like
yesterday” .

Toll slowly.

One half-hour completes the breach , and thy lord
grows wild of speech—

Get thee in, sweet lady, and pray !

LXIV.

“In the east tower, high’st of all, loud he cues for steed
from stall” :

Toll slowly.

“‘He would ride as far,’ quoth he, ‘as for love and
victory,
Though he rides the castle-wall.’

LXV.

“And we fetch the steed from stall, up where never a
hoof did fall”—

Toll slowly.

“Wifely prayer meets deathly need: may the sweet
Heavens hear thee plead
If he rides the castle-wall!”

LXVI.

Low she dropt her head, and lower, till her hair coiled
on the floor—

Toll slowly.

And tear after tear you heard fall distinct as any word
Which you might be listening for.

LXVII.

“Get thee in, thou soft ladye ! here is never a place for
thee ! ”

Toll slowly.

“Braid thine hair and clasp thy gown, that thy beauty
in its moan
May find grace with Leigh of Leigh.”

LXVIII.

She stood up in bitter case, with a pale yet steady face .

Toll slowly.

Like a statue thunderstruck, which, though quivering,
seems to look
Right against the thunder-place.

LXIX

And her foot trod in, with pride, her own tears i' the
stone beside—

Toll slowly.

“Go to, faithful friends, go to ! judge no more what
ladies do,
No, nor how their lords may ride ! ”

LXX.

Then the good steed's rein she took, and his neck did
kiss and stroke.

Toll slowly.

Soft he neighed to answer her, and then followed up
the stair

For the love of her sweet look :

LXXI.

Oh, and steeply, steeply wound up the narrow stair
around—

Toll slowly

Oh, and closely, closely speeding, step by step beside
her treading

Did he follow, meek as hound.

LXXII.

On the east tower, high'st of all,—there, where never a
hoof did fall—

Toll slowly.

Out they swept, a vision steady, noble steed and lovely
lady,

Calm as if in bower or stall.

LXXIII.

Down she knelt at her lord's knee, and she looked up
silently—

Toll slowly.

And he kissed her twice and thrice, for that look within
her eyes

Which he could not bear to see.

LXXIV.

Quoth he, "Get thee from this strife, and the sweet
saints bless thy life !"

Toll slowly.

"In this hour I stand in need of my noble red-roan
steed,

But no more of my noble wife."

LXXV.

Quoth she, "Meekly have I done all thy biddings under
sun":

Toll slowly

"But by all my womanhood, which is proved so, true
and good,

I will never do this one.

LXXVI.

“Now by womanhood’s degree and by wifehood’s
verity”—

Toll slowly.

“In this hour if thou hast need of thy noble red-roan
steed,

Thou hast also need of *me*.

LXXVII.

“By this golden ring ye see on this lifted hand
pardie”—

Toll slowly.

“If, this hour, on castle-wall can be room for steed from
stall,

Shall be also room for *me*.

LXXVIII.

“So the sweet saints with me be,” (did she utter
solemnly)—

Toll slowly.

“If a man, this eventide, on this castle wall will ride,
He shall ride the same with *me*.”

LXXIX.

Oh, he sprang up in the selle and he laughed out bitter-
well—

Toll slowly.

“Wouldst thou ride among the leaves, as we used on
other eves,
To hear chime a vesper-bell?”

LXXX.

She clung closer to his knee—“Ay, beneath the
cypress-tree!”

Toll slowly.

“Mock me not, for otherwhere than along the green-
wood fair
Have I ridden fast with thee.

LXXXI.

“Fast I rode with new-made vows from my angry
kinsman’s house”.

Toll slowly.

“What, and would you men should reck that I dared
more for love’s sake
As a bride than as a spouse?”

LXXXII.

“What, and would you it should fall, as a proverb,
before all”—

Toll slowly

“That a bride may keep your side while through castle-
gate you ride,
Yet eschew the castle-wall?”

LXXXIII.

Ho! the breach yawns into ruin and roars up against
her sung—

Toll slowly.

With the inarticulate din and the dreadful falling in—
Shrieks of doing and undoing!

LXXXIV.

Twice he wrung her hands in twain, but the small hands
closed again.

Toll slowly.

Back he reined the steed—back, back! but she trailed
along his track

With a frantic clasp and strain.

LXXXV.

Evermore the foemen pour through the crash of window
and door—

Toll slowly.

And the shouts of Leigh and Leigh, and the shrieks of
“kill !” and “flee !”
Strike up clear amid the roar.

LXXXVI

Thrice he wrung her hands in twain, but they closed and
clung again—

Toll slowly.

While she clung, as one, withstood, clasps a Christ upon
the rood,
In a spasm of deathly pain.

LXXXVII.

She clung wild and she clung mute with her shuddering
lips half-shut .

Toll slowly.

Her head fallen as half in swoond, hair and knee swept
on the ground,
She clung wild to sturup and foot.

LXXXVIII.

Back he reined his steed back-thrown on the slippery
coping-stone :

Toll slowly.

Back the iron hoofs did grind on the battlement behind
Whence a hundred feet went down .

LXXXIX.

And his heel did press and goad on the quivering flank
bestrode—

Toll slowly.

“ Friends and brothers, save my wife ! Pardon, sweet, in
change for life,—
But I ride alone to God.”

XC.

Straight as if the Holy name had upbreathed her like a
flame—

Toll slowly.

She upsprang, she rose upright, in his selle she sate in
sight,

By her love she overcame.

XCI.

And her head was on his breast where she smiled as
one at rest—

Toll slowly.

“Ring,” she cried, “O vesper-bell in the beechwood’s
old chapelle—

But the passing-bell rings best !”

XCII.

They have caught out at the rein which Sir Guy threw
loose—in vain—

Toll slowly

For the horse in stark despair, with his front hoofs poised
in air,

On the last verge rears amain.

XCIII.

Now he hangs, he rocks between, and his nostrils
curdle in—

Toll slowly

Now he shivers head and hoof and the flakes of foam
fall off,

And his face grows fierce and thin :

XCIV

And a look of human woe from his staring eyes did go :

Toll slowly.

And a sharp cry uttered he, in a foretold agony *

Of the headlong death below,—

XCV.

And, “Ring, ring, thou passing-bell,” still she cried,

“I’ the old chapelle !”

Toll slowly.

Then, back-toppling, crashing back—a dead weight flung

out to wrack,

Horse and riders overfell.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang

west—

Toll slowly.

And I read this ancient Rhyme, in the churchyard, while

the chime

Slowly tolled for one at rest.

II.

The abeles moved in the sun, and the river smooth did
run—

Toll slowly.

And the ancient Rhyme rang strange, with its passion
and its change,

Here, where all done lay undone.

III.

And beneath a willow tree I a little grave did see—

Toll slowly—

Where was graved —HERE, UNDEFILED, LIETH MAUD,

A THREE-YEAR CHILD,

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED FORTY-THREE.

IV.

Then O spints, did I say, ye who rode so fast that
day—

Toll slowly.

Did star-wheels and angel wings with their holy win-
nowings

Keep beside you all the way?

v.

Though in passion ye would dash, with a blind and
heavy crash—

Toll slowly—

Up against the thick-bossed shield of God's judgment
in the field,—

Though your heart and brain were rash,—

vi.

Now, your will is all unwilling ; now, your pulses are all
stilled .

Toll slowly.

Now, ye lie as meek and mild (whereso laid) as Maud
the child

Whose small grave was lately filled.

vii.

Beating heart and burning brow, ye are very patient
now—

Toll slowly.

And the children might be bold to pluck the kingcups
from your mould

Ere a month had let them grow.

VIII.

And you let the goldfinch sing in the alder near in
spring—

Toll slowly

Let her build her nest and sit all the three weeks out
on it,

Murmuring not at anything

IX.

In your patience ye are strong, cold and heat ye take
not wrong—

Toll slowly

When the trumpet of the angel blows eternity's evangel,
Time will seem to you not long

X.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang
west—

Toll slowly

And I said in underbreath,—All our life is mixed with
death,

And who knoweth which is best ?

XI.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang
west—

I'll slowly

And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed around
our incompleteness,—

Round our restlessness, His rest.

THE ROMANCE OF THE SWAN'S NEST.

So the dreams depart,
 So the fading phantoms flee,
 And the sharp reality
 Now must act its part.

WESTWOOD'S *Beads from a Rosary*

I.

LITTLE Ellie sits alone

'Mid the beeches of a meadow,
 By a stream-side on the grass,
 And the trees are showering down
 Doubles of their leaves in shadow
 On her shining hair and face

II.

She has thrown her bonnet by,
 And her feet she has been dipping
 In the shallow water's flow :
 Now she holds them nakedly
 In her hands, all sleek and dripping,
 While she rocketh to and fro.

III.

Little Ellie sits alone,
And the smile she softly uses
Fills the silence like a speech
While she thinks what shall be done,
And the sweetest pleasure chooses
For her future within reach.

IV.

Little Ellie in her smile
Chooses—"I will have a lover
Riding on a steed of steeds :
He shall love me without guile,
And to *him* I will discover
The swan's nest among the reeds.

V.

"And the steed shall be red-roan,
And the lover shall be noble,
With an eye that takes the breath :
And the lute he plays upon
Shall strike ladies into trouble,
As his sword strikes men to death.

VI

“And the steed it shall be shod
All in silver, housed in azure,
And the mane shall swim the wind ;
And the hoofs along the sod
Shall flash onward and keep measure,
Till the shepherds look behind.

VII.

“But my lover will not prize
All the glory that he rides in,
When he gazes in my face .
He will say, ‘O Love, thine eyes
Build the shrine my soul abides in,
And I kneel here for thy grace !’

VIII.

“Then, ay, then he shall kneel low,
With the red-roan steed anear him
Which shall seem to understand,
Till I answer, ‘Rise and go !’
For the world must love and fear him
Whom I gift with heart and hand.’

IX

"Then he will arise so pale,
 I shall feel my own lips tremble
 With a *yes* I must not say,
 Nathless maiden-brave, 'Farewell,'
 I will utter, and dissemble—
 'Light to-morrow with to-day!'

X.

"Then he 'll ride among the hills
 To the wide world past the river,
 There to put away all wrong ;
 To make straight distorted wills,
 And to empty the broad quiver
 Which the wicked bear along.

XI.

"Three times shall a young foot-page
 Swim the stream and climb the mountain
 And kneel down beside my feet—
 'Lo, my master sends this gage,
 Lady, for thy pity's counting !
 What wilt thou exchange for it?

XII.

“And the first time I will send
A white rosebud for a guerdon,
And the second time, a glove,
But the third time—I may bend
From my pride, and answer—‘Pardon
If he comes to take my love.’

XIII

“Then the young foot-page will run,
Then my lover will ride faster,
Till he kneeleth at my knee:
‘I am a duke’s eldest son,
Thousand serfs do call me master,
But, O Love, I love but *thee!*’

XIV.

“He will kiss me on the mouth
Then, and lead me as a lover
Through the crowds that praise his deeds;
And, when soul-tied by one troth,
Unto *him* I will discover
That swan’s nest among the reeds.”

XV.

Little Ellie, with her smile
Not yet ended, rose up gaily,
Tied the bonnet, donned the shoe,
And went homeward, round a mile,
Just to see, as she did daily,
What more eggs were with the two

XVI.

Pushing through the elm-tree copse,
Winding up the stream, light-hearted,
Where the osier pathway leads,
Past the boughs she stoops—and stops.
Lo, the wild swan had deserted,
And a rat had gnawed the reeds!

XVII.

Ellie went home sad and slow.
If she found the lover ever,
With his red-roan steed of steeds,
Sooth I know not, but I know
She could never show him—never,
That swan's nest among the reeds!

BERTHA IN THE LANE.

I

PUT the broidery-frame away,
 For my sewing is all done
 The last thread is used to-day,
 And I need not join it on.
 Though the clock stands at the noon
 I am weary I have sewn,
 Sweet, for thee, a wedding-gown

II

Sister, help me to the bed,
 And stand near me, Dearest-sweet
 Do not shrink nor be afraid,
 Blushing with a sudden heat !
 No one standeth in the street ?—
 By God's love I go to meet,
 Love I thee with love complete.

III.

Lean thy face down, drop it in
These two hands, that I may hold
'Twixt their palms thy cheek and chin,
Stroking back the curls of gold :
'T is a fair, fair face, in sooth—
Larger eyes and redder mouth
Than mine were in my first youth.

IV.

Thou art younger by seven years—
Ah !—so bashful at my gaze,
That the lashes, hung with tears,
Grow too heavy to upraise ?
I would wound thee by no touch
Which thy shyness feels as such.
Dost thou mind me, Dear, so much ?

V.

Have I not been nigh a mother
To thy sweetness—tell me, Dear ?
Have we not loved one another
Tenderly, from year to year,
Since our dying mother mild
Said with accents undefiled,
“ Child, be mother to this child ” !

VI

Mother, mother, up in heaven,
Stand up on the jasper sea,
And be witness I have given
All the gifts required of me,—
Hope that blessed me, bliss that crowned,
Love that left me with a wound,
Life itself that turneth round !

VII.

Mother, mother, thou art kind,
Thou art standing in the room,
In a molten glory shrined
That rays off into the gloom !
But thy smile is bright and bleak
Like cold waves—I cannot speak,
I sob in it, and grow weak.

VIII

Ghostly mother, keep aloof
One hour longer from my soul,
For I still am thinking of
Earth's warm-beating joy and dole !
On my finger is a ring
Which I still see glittering
When the night hides everything.

IX.

Little sister, thou art pale !

Ah, I have a wandering brain—
But I lose that fever-bale,

And my thoughts grow calm again.
Lean down closer—closer still !
I have words thine ear to fill,
And would kiss thee at my will.

X.

Dear, I heard thee in the spring,
Thee and Robert—through the trees,—
When we all went gathering
Boughs of May-bloom for the bees.
Do not start so ! think instead
How the sunshine overhead
Seemed to trickle through the shade.

XI.

What a day it was, that day !
Hills and vales did openly
Seem to heave and throb away
At the sight of the great sky :
And the silence, as it stood
In the glory's golden flood,
Audibly did bud, and bud.

XII.

Through the winding hedgerows green,
How we wandered, I and you,
With the bowery tops shut in,
And the gates that showed the view !
How we talked there ; thrushes soft
Sang our praises out, or oft
Bleatings took them from the croft .

XIII.

Till the pleasure grown too strong
Left me muter evermore,
And, the winding road being long,
I walked out of sight, before,
And so, wrapt in musings fond,
Issued (past the wayside pond)
On the meadow-lands beyond.

XIV.

I sate down beneath the beech
Which leans over to the lane,
And the far sound of your speech
Did not promise any pain ;
And I blessed you full and free,
With a smile stooped tenderly
O'er the May-flowers on my knee.

XV

But the sound grew into word
As the speakers drew more near—
Sweet, forgive me that I heard
What you wished me not to hear.
Do not weep so, do not shake,
Oh,—I heard thee, Bertha, make
Good true answers for my sake.

XVI

Yes, and HE too! let him stand
In thy thoughts, untouched by blame.
Could he help it, if my hand
He had claimed with hasty claim?
That was wrong perhaps—but then
Such things be—and will, again.
Women cannot judge for men.

XVII.

Had he seen thee when he swore
He would love but me alone?
Thou wast absent, sent before
To our kin in Sidmouth town.
When he saw thee who art best
Past compare, and loveliest.
He but judged thee as the rest.

XVIII.

Could we blame him with grave words,
Thou and I, Dear, if we might ?
Thy brown eyes have looks like birds
Flying straightway to the light
Mine are older.—Hush !—look out—
Up the street ! Is none without ?
How the poplar swings about !

XIX.

And that hour—beneath the beech,
When I listened in a dream,
And he said in his deep speech
That he owed me all *esteem*,—
Each word swam in on my brain
With a dim, dilating pain,
Till it burst with that last strain.

XX.

I fell flooded with a dark,
In the silence of a swoon.
When I rose, still cold and stark,
There was night ; I saw the moon
And the stars, each in its place,
And the May-blooms on the grass,
Seemed to wonder what I was.

XXI.

And I walked as if apart
From myself, when I could stand,
And I pitied my own heart,
As if I held it in my hand—
Somewhat coldly, with a sense
Of fulfilled benevolence,
And a “Poor thing” negligence.

XXII.

And I answered coldly too,
When you met me at the door ;
And I only *heard* the dew
Dripping from me to the floor :
And the flowers, I bade you see,
Were too withered for the bee,—
As my life, henceforth, for me.

XXIII

Do not weep so—Dear,—heart-warm !
All was best as it befell.
If I say he did me harm,
I speak wild,—I am not well.
All his words were kind and good—
He esteemed me. Only, blood
Runs so faint in womanhood !

XXIV

Then I always was too grave,—
Liked the saddest ballad sung,—
With that look, besides, we have
In our faces, who die young.
I had died, Dear, all the same ;
Life's long, joyous, jostling game
Is too loud for my meek shame.

XXV

We are so unlike each other,
Thou and I, that none could guess
We were children of one mother,
But for mutual tenderness
Thou art rose-lined from the cold,
And meant verily to hold
Life's pure pleasures manifold.

XXVI.

I am pale as crocus grows
Close beside a rose-tree's root ;
Whosoe'er would reach the rose,
Treads the crocus underfoot
I, like May-bloom on thorn-tree,
Thou, like merry summer-bee,—
Fit that I be plucked for thee !

XXVII.

Yet who plucks me?—no one mourns,
I have lived my season out,
And now die of my own thorns
Which I could not live without.
Sweet, be merry! How the light
Comes and goes! If it be night,
Keep the candles in my sight

XXVIII.

Are there footsteps at the door?
Look out quickly. Yea, or nay?
Some one might be waiting for
Some last word that I might say.
Nay? So best!—so angels would
Stand off clear from deathly road,
Not to cross the sight of God.

XXIX

Colder grow my hands and feet
When I wear the shroud I made,
Let the folds lie straight and neat,
And the rosemary be spread,
That if any friend should come,
(To see *thee*, Sweet!) all the room
May be lifted out of gloom.

XXX.

And, dear Bertha, let me keep
On my hand this little ring,
Which at nights, when others sleep,
I can still see glittering !
Let me wear it out of sight,
In the grave,—where it will light
All the dark up, day and night.

XXXI

On that grave drop not a tear !
Else, though fathom-deep the place,
Through the woollen shroud I wear
I shall feel it on my face
Rather smile there, blessèd one,
Thinking of me in the sun,
Or forget me—smiling on !

XXXII.

Art thou near me ? nearer ! so—
Kiss me close upon the eyes,
That the earthly light may go
Sweetly, as it used to rise
When I watched the morning-grey
Strike, betwixt the hills, the way
He was sure to come that day.

XXXIII.

So,—no more vain words be said!
The hosannas nearer roll.
Mother, smile now on thy Dead,
I am death-strong in my soul.
Mystic Dove alit on cross,
Guide the poor bird of the snows
Through the snow-wind above loss!

XXXIV.

Jesus, Victim, comprehending
Love's divine self-abnegation,
Cleanse my love in its self-spending,
And absorb the poor libation!
Wind my thread of life up higher,
Up, through angels' hands of fire!
I aspire while I expire.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP.

A ROMANCE OF THE AGE.

A Poet writes to his Friend PLACE—*A Room in Wycombe Hall.* TIME—*Late in the evening*

I.

DEAR my friend and fellow-student, I would lean my
spirit o'er you !

Down the purple of this chamber tears should scarcely
run at will.

I am humbled who was humble Friend, I bow my
head before you :

You should lead me to my peasants, but their faces are
too still

II.

There 's a lady, an earl's daughter,—she is proud and she
is noble,

And she treads the crimson carpet and she breathes the
perfumed air,

And a kingly blood sends glances up, her princely eye
to trouble,
And the shadow of a monarch's crown is softened in her
hair.

III.

She has halls among the woodlands, she has castles by
the breakers,
She has farms and she has manors, she can threaten and
command.
And the palpitating engines snort in steam across her
acres,
As they mark upon the blasted heaven the measure of
the land.

IV.

There are none of England's daughters who can show a
prouder presence;
Upon princely suitors' praying she has looked in her
disdain.
She was sprung of English nobles, I was born of English
peasants;
What was *I* that I should love her, save for competence
to pain?

V.

I was only a poor poet, made for singing at her casement,
As the finches or the thrushes, while she thought of
other things.

Oh, she walked so high above me, she appeared to my
abasement,

In her lovely silken murmur, like an angel clad in wings !

VI.

Many vassals bow before her as her carriage sweeps
their doorways ;

She has blest their little children, as a priest or queen
were she :

Far too tender, or too cruel far, her smile upon the poor
was,

For I thought it was the same smile which she used to
smile on *me*.

VII.

She has voters in the Commons, she has lovers in the
palace,

And, of all the fair court-ladies, few have jewels half as fine ,
Oft the Prince has named her beauty 'twixt the red wine
and the chalice :

Oh, and what was *I* to love her ? my beloved, my Geraldine !

VIII.

Yet I could not choose but love her. I was born to
poet-uses,
To love all things set above me, all of good and all of fair.
Nymphs of mountain, not of valley, we are wont to call
the Muses,
And in nympholeptic climbing, poets pass from mount
to star.

IX.

And because I was a poet, and because the public
praised me,
With a critical deduction for the modern writer's fault,
I could sit at rich men's tables,—though the courtesies
that raised me,
Still suggested clear between us the pale spectrum of the
salt.

X.

And they praised me in her presence—"Will your book
appear this summer?"
Then returning to each other—"Yes, our plans are for
the moors."
Then with whisper dropped behind me—"There he is!
the latest comer.
Oh, she only likes his verses! what is over, she endures.

XI.

“Quite low-born, self-educated ! somewhat gifted though
by nature,
And we make a point of asking him,—of being very
kind.
You may speak, he does not hear you ! and, besides,
he writes no satire,—
All these serpents kept by charmers leave the natural
sting behind.’

XII.

I grew scornfuller, grew colder, as I stood up there
among them,
Till as frost intense will burn you, the cold scorning
scorched my brow ;
When a sudden silver speaking, gravely cadenced, over-
rung them,
And a sudden silken stirring touched my inner nature
through.

XIII.

I looked upward and beheld her : with a calm and
regnant spirit,
Slowly round she swept her eyelids, and said clear before
them all—

“Have you such superfluous honour, sir, that able to
confer it

You will come down, Mister Bertram, as my guest to
Wycombe Hall?”

XIV.

Here she paused ; she had been paler at the first word of
her speaking,

But, because a silence followed it, blushed somewhat, as
for shame :

Then, as scorning her own feeling, resumed calmly—“I
am seeking

More distinction than these gentlemen think worthy of
my claim.

XV.

“Ne’ertheless, you see, I seek it—not because I am a
woman,”

(Here her smile sprang like a fountain and, so, over-
flowed her mouth)

“But because my woods in Sussex have some purple
shades at gloaming

Which are worthy of a king in state, or poet in his
youth.

XVI.

"I invite you, Mister Bertram, to no scene for worldly speeches—

Sir, I scarce should dare—but only where God asked the thrushes first.

And if *you* will sing beside them, in the covert of my beeches,

I will thank you for the woodlands,—for the human world, at worst "

XVII.

Then she smiled around right childly, then she gazed around right queenly,

And I bowed—I could not answer ; alternated light and gloom—

While as one who quells the lions, with a steady eye serenely,

She, with level fronting eyelids, passed out stately from the room.

XVIII.

Oh, the blessèd woods of Sussex, I can hear them still around me,

With their leafy tide of greenery still rippling up the wind !

Oh, the cursèd woods of Sussex ! where the hunter's
 arrow found me,
When a fair face and a tender voice had made me mad
 and blind !

XIX.

In that ancient hall of Wycombe thronged the numerous
 guests invited,
And the lovely London ladies trod the floors with gliding
 feet ;
And their voices low with fashion, not with feeling, softly
 freighted
All the air about the windows with elastic laughs
 sweet.

XX.

For at eve the open windows flung their light out on the
 terrace
Which the floating orbs of curtains did with gradual
 shadow sweep,
While the swans upon the river, fed at morning by the
 heiress,
Trembled downward through their snowy wings at music
 in their sleep.

XXI.

And there evermore was music, both of instrument and
singing,
Till the finches of the shubberies grew restless in the
dark ;
But the cedars stood up motionless, each in a moonlight's
ringing,
And the deer, half in the glimmer, strewed the hollows
of the park.

XXII.

And though sometimes she would bind me with her
silver-corded speeches
To commix my words and laughter with the converse
and the jest,
Oft I sat apart and, gazing on the river through the
beeches,
Heard, as pure the swans swam down it, her pure voice
o'erfloat the rest.

XXIII

In the morning, horn of huntsman, hoof of steed and
laugh of rider,
Spread out cheery from the courtyard till we lost them
in the hills,

While herself and other ladies, and her suitors left beside
her,
Went a-wandering up the gardens through the laurels
and abeles.

XXIV.

Thus, her foot upon the new-mown grass, bareheaded,
with the flowing
Of the virginal white vesture gathered closely to her
throat,
And the golden ringlets in her neck just quickened by
her going,
And appearing to breathe sun for air, and doubting if to
float,—

XXV.

With a bunch of dewy maple, which her right hand held
above her,
And which trembled a green shadow in betwixt her and
the skies,
As she turned her face in going, thus, she drew me on to
love her,
And to worship the divineness of the smile hid in her
eyes.

XXVI

For her eyes alone smile constantly, her lips have serious
sweetness,
And her front is calm, the dimple rarely ripples on the
cheek,
But her deep blue eyes smile constantly, as if they in
discreetness
Kept the secret of a happy dream she did not care to
speak

XXVII.

Thus she drew me the first morning, out across into the
garden,
And I walked among her noble friends and could not
keep behind.
Spake she unto all and unto me—"Behold, I am the
warden
Of the song-birds in these lindens, which are cages to
their mind

XXVIII.

"But within this swarded circle into which the lime-walk
brings us,
Whence the beeches, rounded greenly, stand away in
reverent fear,

I will let no music enter, saving what the fountain
sings us
Which the lilies round the basin may seem pure enough
to hear.

XXIX.

“The live air that waves the lilies waves the slender jet
of water
Like a holy thought sent feebly up from soul of fasting
saint :
Whereby lies a marble Silence, sleeping (Lough the
sculptor wrought her),
So asleep she is forgetting to say Hush !—a fancy
quaint.

XXX

“Mark how heavy white her eyelids ! not a dream be-
tween them lingers ;
And the left hand's index droppeth from the lips upon
the cheek
While the right hand,—with the symbol-rose held slack
within the fingers,—
Has fallen backward in the basin—yet this Silence will
not speak !

XXXI.

“That the essential meaning growing may exceed the
special symbol,
Is the thought as I conceive it · it applies more high and
low
Our true noblemen will often through right nobleness
grow humble,
And assert an inward honour by denying outward show.”

XXXII.

“Nay, your Silence,” said I, “truly, holds her symbol-rose
but slackly,
Yet *she holds it*, or would scarcely be a Silence to our
ken
And your nobles wear their ermine on the outside, or
walk blackly
In the presence of the social law as mere ignoble men

XXXIII.

“Let the poets dream such dreaming ! madam, in these
British islands
'T is the substance that wanes ever, 't is the symbol that
exceeds.

Soon we shall have nought but symbol and, for statues
like this Silence,
Shall accept the rose's image— in another case, the
weed's."

XXXIV.

"Not so quickly," she retorted,—“I confess, where'er
you go, you
Find for things, names—shows for actions, and pure gold
for honour clear :
But when all is run to symbol in the Social, I will throw
you
The world's book which now reads dryly, and sit down
with Silence here."

XXXV.

Half in playfulness she spoke, I thought, and half in
indignation ;
Friends, who listened, laughed her words off, while her
lovers deemed her fair .
A fair woman, flushed with feeling, in her noble-lighted
station
Near the statue's white reposing—and both bathed in
sunny air !

XXXVI.

With the trees round, not so distant but you heard their
 vernal murmur,
And beheld in light and shadow the leaves in and out-
 ward move,
And the little fountain leaping toward the sun-heart to be
 warmer,
Then recoiling in a tremble from the too much light
 above.

XXXVII.

'T is a picture for remembrance And thus, morning after
 morning,
Did I follow as she drew me by the spirit to her feet
Why, her greyhound followed also ! dogs—we both were
 dogs for scorning—
'To be sent back when she pleased it and her path lay
 through the wheat

XXXVIII

And thus, morning after morning, spite of vows and spite
 of sorrow,
Did I follow at her drawing, while the week-days passed
 along,—

Just to feed the swans this noontide, or to see the fawns
to-morrow,
Or to teach the hill-side echo some sweet Tuscan in a
song

XXXIX.

Ay, for sometimes on the hill-side, while we sate down in
the gowans,
With the forest green behind us and its shadow cast
before,
And the river running under, and across it from the
rowans
A brown partridge whirring near us till we felt the air it
bore,—

XL.

There, obedient to her praying, did I read aloud the
poems
Made to Tuscan flutes, or instruments more various
of our own,
Read the pastoral parts of Spenser, or the subtle inter-
flowings
Found in Petrarch's sonnets—here's the book, the leaf is
folded down !

XLI.

Or at times a modern volume, Wordsworth's solemn-
thoughted idyl,
Howitt's ballad-verse, or Tennyson's enchanted reverie,—
Or from Browning some "Pomegranate," which, if cut
deep down the middle,
Shows a heart within blood-tinctured, of a veined
humanity.

XLII.

Or at times I read there, hoarsely, some new poem of
my making:
Poets ever fail in reading their own verses to their
worth,
For the echo in you breaks upon the words which you
are speaking,
And the chariot wheels jar in the gate through which
you drive them forth.

XLIII

After, when we were grown tired of books, the silence
round us flinging
A slow arm of sweet compression, felt with beatings at
the breast

She would break out on a sudden in a gush of woodland
singing,
Like a child's emotion in a god—a naiad tired of rest

XLIV.

Oh, to see or hear her singing ! scarce I know which is
divinest,
For her looks sing too—she modulates her gestures on
the tune,
And her mouth stirs with the song, like song , and when
the notes are finest,
'T is the eyes that shoot out vocal light and seem to swell
them on.

XLV

Then we talked—oh, how we talked ! her voice, so
cadenced in the talking,
Made another singing—of the soul ! a music without
bars :
While the leafy sounds of woodlands, humming round
where we were walking,
Brought interposition worthy-sweet,—as skies about the
stars.

XLVI

And she spake such good thoughts natural, as if she
always thought them ,
She had sympathies so rapid, open, free as bird on
branch,
Just as ready to fly east as west, whichever way besought
them,
In the birchen-wood a chirrup, or a cock-crow in the
grange.

XLVII.

In her utmost lightness there is truth—and often she
speaks lightly,
Has a grace in being gay which even mournful souls
approve,
For the root of some grave earnest thought is under-
struck so rightly
As to justify the foliage and the waving flowers above.

XLVIII

And she talked on—*we* talked, rather ! upon all things,
substance, shadow,
Of the sheep that browsed the grasses, of the reapers in
the corn,

Of the little children from the schools, seen winding
through the meadow,
Of the poor rich world beyond them, still kept poorer by
its scorn.

XLIX.

So, of men, and so, of letters—books are men of higher
stature,
And the only men that speak aloud for future times to
hear ;
So, of mankind in the abstract, which grows slowly into
nature,
Yet will lift the cry of “progress,” as it trod from sphere
to sphere.

L.

And her custom was to praise me when I said,—“The
Age culls simples,
With a broad clown’s back turned broadly to the glory
of the stars.
We are gods by our own reck’ning, and may well shut up
the temples,
And wield on, amid the incense-steam, the thunder of
our cars.

LI.

“For we throw out acclamations of self-thanking, self
admiring,
With, at every mile run faster,—‘O the wondrous
wondrous age!’
Little thinking if we work our SOULS as nobly as our
iron,
Or if angels will commend us at the goal of pilgrimage.

LII.

“Why, what *is* this patient entrance into nature’s deep
resources
But the child’s most gradual learning to walk upright
without bane?
When we drive out, from the cloud of steam, majestic
white horses,
Are we greater than the first men who led black ones by
the mane?

LIII.

“If we trod the deeps of ocean, if we struck the stars
in rising,
If we wrapped the globe intensely with one hot electric
breath,

'T were but power within our tether, no new spirit-power
comprising,
And in life we were not greater men, nor bolder men in
death."

LIV.

She was patient with my talking , and I loved her, loved
her certes
As I loved all heavenly objects, with uplifted eyes and
hands ;
As I loved pure inspirations, loved the graces, loved the
virtues,
In a Love content with writing his own name on desert
sands.

LV.

Or at least I thought so, purely ; thought no idiot Hope
was raising
Any crown to crown Love's silence, silent Love that sate
alone :
Out, alas ! the stag is like me, he that tries to go on
grazing
With the great deep gun-wound in his neck, then reels
with sudden moan.

LVI

It was thus I reeled I told you that her hand had many
 suits ;
But she smiles them down imperially as Venus did the
 waves,
And with such a gracious coldness that they cannot press
 their futures
On the present of her courtesy, which yieldingly en-
 slaves

LVII.

And this morning as I sat alone within the inner
 chamber
With the great saloon beyond it, lost in pleasant thought
 serene,
For I had been reading Camoens, that poem you re-
 member,
Which his lady's eyes are praised in as the sweetest ever
 seen.

LVIII.

And the book lay open, and my thought flew from it,
 taking from it
A vibration and impulsion to an end beyond its own,

As the branch of a green osier, when a child would
overcome it,
Springs up freely from his claspings and goes swinging in
the sun

LIX.

As I mused I heard a murmur, it grew deep as it grew
longer,
Speakers using earnest language—"Lady Geraldine, you
would!"
And I heard a voice that pleaded, ever on in accents
stronger,
As a sense of reason gave it power to make its rhetoric
good

LX.

Well I knew that voice; it was an earl's, of soul that
matched his station,
Soul completed into lordship, might and right read on his
brow;
Very finely couiteous, far too proud to doubt his domi-
nation
Of the common people, he atones for grandeur by a
bow.

LXI.

High straight forehead, nose of eagle, cold blue eyes of
less expression
Than resistance, coldly casting off the looks of other
men,
As steel, arrows, unelastic lips which seem to taste
possession
And be cautious lest the common air should injure or
distrain

LXII.

For the rest, accomplished, upright,—ay, and standing
by his order
With a bearing not ungraceful ; fond of art and letters
too ;
Just a good man made a proud man,—as the sandy rocks
that border
A wild coast, by circumstances, in a regnant ebb and
flow.

LXIII.

Thus, I knew that voice, I heard it, and I could not help
the hearkening :
In the room I stood up blindly, and my burning heart
within

Secmed to seethe and fuse my senses till they ran on all
sides darkening,
And scorched, weighed like melted metal round my feet
that stood therein.

LXIV.

And that voice, I heard it pleading, for love's sake, for
wealth, position,
For the sake of liberal uses and great actions to be
done :
And she interrupted gently, "Nay, my lord, the old
tradition
Of your Normans, by some worthier hand than mine is,
should be won."

LXV.

"Ah, that white hand!" he said quickly,—and in his he
either drew it
Or attempted—for with gravity and instance she re-
plied,
"Nay, indeed, my lord, this talk is vain, and we had best
eschew it
And pass on, like friends, to other points less easy to
decide"

LXVI.

What he said again, I know not: it is likely that his
trouble

Worked his pride up to the surface, for she answered in
slow scorn,

“And your lordship judges rightly Whom I marry
shall be noble,

Ay, and wealthy. I shall never blush to think how he
was born.”

LXVII.

There, I maddened ' her words stung me. Life swept
through me into fever,

And my soul sprang up astonished, sprang full-statured
in an hour

Know you what it is when anguish, with apocalyptic
NEVER,

To a Pythian height dilates you, and despair sublimates to
power?

LXVIII

From my brain the soul-wings budded, waved a flame
about my body,

Whence conventions coiled to ashes. I felt self-drawn
out, as man,

From amalgamate false natures, and I saw the skies grow
 ruddy
With the deepening feet of angels, and I knew what
 spirits can.

LXIX

I was mad, inspired—say either ! (anguish worketh in-
 spiration)
Was a man or beast—perhaps so, for the tiger roars when
 speared ;
And I walked on, step by step along the level of my
 passion—
Oh my soul ! and passed the doorway to her face, and
 never feared.

LXX.

He had left her, peradventure, when my footstep proved
 my coming,
But for *her*—she half arose, then sate, grew scarlet and
 grew pale.
Oh, she trembled ! 't is so always with a worldly man or
 woman
In the presence of true spirits ; what else *can* they do but
 quail ?

LXXI.

Oh, she fluttered like a tame bird, in among its forest-
brothers
Far too strong for it ; then drooping, bowed her face
upon her hands ;
And I spake out wildly, fiercely, brutal truths of her and
others .
I, she planted in the desert, swathed her, windlike, with
my sands.

LXXII.

I plucked up her social fictions, bloody-rooted though
leaf-verdant,
Trod them down with words of shaming,—all the purple
and the gold,
All the “landed stakes” and lordships, all that spirits
pure and ardent
Are cast out of love and honour because chancing not
to hold.

LXXIII.

“For myself I do not argue,” said I, “though I love
you, madam,
But for better souls that nearer to the height of yours
have trod ;

And this age shows, to my thinking, still more infidels to
Adam

Than directly, by profession, simple infidels to God.

LXXIV.

“Yet, O God,” I said, “O grave,” I said, “O mother’s
heart and bosom,

With whom first and last are equal, saint and corpse and
little child !

We are fools to your deductions, in these figments of
heart-closing ;

We are traitors to your causes, in these sympathies de-
filed.

LXXV.

“Learn more reverence, madam, not for rank or
wealth—*that* needs no learning .

That comes quickly, quick as sin does, ay, and culmi-
nates to sin ,

But for Adam’s seed, MAN ! Trust me, ’t is a clay above
your scorning,

With God’s image stamped upon it, and God’s kindling
breath within.

LXXVI

“What right have you, madam, gazing in your palace
mirror daily,
Getting so by heart your beauty which all others must
adore,
While you draw the golden ringlets down your fingers, to
vow gaily
You will wed no man that’s only good to God, and
nothing more ?

LXXVII

“Why, what right have you, made fair by that same God,
the sweetest woman
Of all women He has fashioned, with your lovely spirit-
face
Which would seem too near to vanish if its smile were
not so human,
And your voice of holy sweetness, turning common words
to grace,—

LXXVIII.

“What right *can* you have, God’s other works to scorn,
despise, revile them
In the gross, as mere men, broadly—not as *noble* men,
forsooth,—

As mere Pariahs of the outer world, forbidden to assail
them

In the hope of living, dying, near that sweetness of your
mouth?

LXXIX.

“Have you any answer, madam? If my spirit were
less earthly,

If its instrument were gifted with a better silver
string,

I would kneel down where I stand, and say—Behold
me! I am worthy

Of thy loving, for I love thee. I am worthy as a king

LXXX.

“As it is—your ermined pride, I swear, shall feel this
stain upon her,

That I, poor, weak, tost with passion, scorned by me
and you again,

Love you, madam, dare to love you, to my grief and
your dishonour,

To my endless desolation, and your impotent dis-
dain!”

LXXXI.

More mad words like these—mere madness! friend, I
 need not write them fuller,
For I hear my hot soul dropping on the lines in showers
 of tears.
Oh, a woman! friend, a woman! why, a beast had
 scarce been duller
Than roar bestial loud complaints against the shining
 of the spheres.

LXXXII.

But at last there came a pause. I stood all vibrating
 with thunder
Which my soul had used. The silence drew her face
 up like a call
Could you guess what word she uttered? She looked
 up, as if in wonder,
With tears beaded on her lashes, and said—"Bertram!"
 —It was all.

LXXXIII.

If she had cursed me, and she might have, or if even,
 with queenly bearing
Which at need is used by women, she had risen up and
 said,

“Sir, you are my guest, and therefore I have given you
a full hearing ·

Now, beseech you, choose a name exacting somewhat
less, instead ! ”—

LXXXIV.

I had borne it · but that “Bertram”—why, it lies there
on the paper

A mere word, without her accent, and you cannot judge
the weight

Of the calm which crushed my passion: I seemed
drowning in a vapour ;

And her gentleness destroyed me whom her scorn
made desolate.

LXXXV.

So, struck backward and exhausted by that inward flow
of passion

Which had rushed on, sparing nothing, into forms of
abstract truth,

By a logic agonizing through unseemly demonstra-
tion,

And by youth's own anguish turning grimly grey the
hairs of youth,—

LXXXVI.

By the sense accursed and instant, that *it* even I spake
wisely
I spake basely—using truth, if what I spake indeed was
true,
To avenge wrong on a woman—*her*, who sate there
weighing nicely
A poor manhood's worth, found guilty of such deeds as
I could do !—

LXXXVII

By such wrong and woe exhausted—what I suffered and
occasioned,—
As a wild horse through a city runs with lightning in his
eyes,
And then dashing at a church's cold and passive wall,
impassioned,
Strikes the death into his burning brain, and blindly
drops and dies—

LXXXVIII.

So I fell, struck down before her—do you blame me,
friend, for weakness?
'T was my strength of passion slew me !—fell before her
like a stone ;

Fast the dreadful world rolled from me on its roaring
wheels of blackness ·

When the light came I was lying in this chamber and
alone,

LXXXIX.

Oh, of course she charged her lacqueys to bear out the
sickly burden,

And to cast it from her scornful sight, but not *beyond* the
gate ;

She is too kind to be cruel, and too haughty not to
pardon

Such a man as I ; 't were something to be level to her
hate.

XC.

But for me—you now are conscious why, my friend, I
write this letter,

How my life is read all backward, and the charm of life
undone.

I shall leave her house at dawn ; I would to-night, if I
were better—

And I charge my soul to hold my body strengthened for
the sun.

XCI.

When the sun has dyed the oriel, I depart, with no last
gazes,
No weak moanings (one word only, left in writing for her
hands),
Out of reach of all derision, and some unavailing praises,
To make front against this anguish in the far and foreign
lands.

XCII.

Blame me not. I would not squander life in grief—I
am abstemious
I but nurse my spirit's falcon that its wing may soar
again
There's no room for tears of weakness in the blind eyes
of a Phœbus:
Into work the poet kneads them, and he does not die
till then.

CONCLUSION.

I.

Bertram finished the last pages, while along the silence
ever

Still in hot and heavy splashes fell the tears on every
leaf.

Having ended, he leans backward in his chair, with lips
that quiver

From the deep unspoken, ay, and deep unwritten thoughts
of grief.

II.

Soh ! how still the lady standeth ! 'T is a dream—a
dream of mercies !

'Twixt the purple lattice-curtains how she standeth still
and pale !

'T is a vision, sure, of mercies, sent to soften his self
curses,

Sent to sweep a patient quiet o'er the tossing of his wail.

III.

“Eyes,” he said, “now throbbing through me ! are ye
eyes that did undo me ?

Shining eyes, like antique jewels set in Parian statue-
stone !

Underneath that calm white forehead are ye ever burning
torrid

O’er the desolate sand-desert of my heart and life un-
done ? ”

IV

With a murmurous stir uncertain, in the air the purple
curtain

Swelleth in and swelleth out around her motionless pale
brows,

While the gliding of the river sends a rippling noise for
ever

Through the open casement whitened by the moonlight’s
slant repose

V

Said he—“Vision of a lady ! stand there silent, stand
there steady !

Now I see it plainly, plainly now I cannot hope or
doubt—

There, the brows of mild repression—there, the lips of
silent passion,
Curvèd like an archer's bow to send the bitter arrows
out."

VI.

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept
smiling,
And approached him slowly, slowly, in a gliding mea-
sured pace ;
With her two white hands extended as if praying one
offended,
And a look of supplication gazing earnest in his face.

VII.

Said he—"Wake me by no gesture,—sound of breath, or
stir of vesture !
Let the blessed apparition melt not yet to its divine !
No approaching—hush, no breathing ! or my heart must
swoon to death in
The too utter life thou bringest, O thou dream of GERAL-
DINE !"

VIII.

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept
smiling,

But the tears ran over lightly from her eyes and tenderly :—

“Dost thou, Bertram, truly love me? Is no woman far
above me

Found more worthy of thy poet-heart than such a one
as *I*?”

IX.

Said he—“I would dream so ever, like the flowing of that
river,

Flowing ever in a shadow greenly onward to the sea !

So, thou vision of all sweetness, princely to a full completeness

Would my heart and life flow onward, deathward, through
this dream of *THEE* !”

X.

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept
smiling,

While the silver tears ran faster down the blushing of her
cheeks ;

Then with both her hands enfolding both of his, she
softly told him,
“Bertram, if I say I love thee, . . . ’t is the vision only
speaks.”

XI.

Softened, quickened to adore her, on his knee he fell
before her,
And she whispered low in triumph, “It shall be as I
have sworn.
Very rich he is in virtues, very noble—noble, certes;
And I shall not blush in knowing that men call him
lowly born.”

*THE RUNAWAY SLAVE AT PILGRIM'S
POINT.*

I

I STAND on the mark beside the shore
 Of the first white pilgrim's bended knee,
 Where exile turned to ancestor,
 And God was thanked for liberty.
 I have run through the night, my skin is as dark,
 I bend my knee down on this mark :
 I look on the sky and the sea

II

O pilgrim-souls, I speak to you !
 I see you come proud and slow
 From the land of the spirits pale as dew
 And round me and round me ye go.
 O pilgrims, I have gasped and run
 All night long from the whips of one
 Who in your names works sin and woe !

III.

And thus I thought that I would come
And kneel here where ye knelt before,
And feel your souls around me hum
In undertone to the ocean's roar ;
And lift my black face, my black hand,
Here, in your names, to curse this land
Ye blessed in freedom's, evermore.

IV.

I am black, I am black,
And yet God made me, they say :
But if He did so, smiling back
He must have cast his work away
Under the feet of his white creatures,
With a look of scorn, that the dusky features
Might be trodden again to clay.

V

And yet He has made dark things
To be glad and merry as light .
There 's a little dark bird sits and sings,
There 's a dark stream ripples out of sight,
And the dark frogs chant in the safe morass,
And the sweetest stars are made to pass
O'er the face of the darkest night.

VI

But *we* who are dark, we are dark !
Ah God, we have no stars !
About our souls in care and cark
Our blackness shuts like prison-bars :
The poor souls crouch so far behind
That never a comfort can they find
By reaching through the prison-bars.

VII.

Indeed we live beneath the sky,
That great smooth Hand of God stretched out
On all His children fatherly,
To save them from the dread and doubt
Which would be if, from this low place,
All opened straight up to His face
Into the grand eternity.

VIII.

And still God's sunshine and His frost,
They make us hot, they make us cold,
As if we were not black and lost ,
And the beasts and birds, in wood and fold,
Do fear and take us for very men :
Could the whip-poor-will or the cat of the glen
Look into my eyes and be bold?

IX.

I am black, I am black !

But, once, I laughed in girlish glee,
For one of my colour stood in the track

Where the drivers drove, and looked at me,
And tender and full was the look he gave—
Could a slave look *so* at another slave?—

I look at the sky and the sea.

X

And from that hour our spirits grew

As free as if unsold, unbought :

Oh, strong enough, since we were two,

To conquer the world, we thought.

The drivers drove us day by day ;

We did not mind, we went one way,

And no better a freedom sought.

XI.

In the sunny ground between the canes,

He said “ I love you ” as he passed ;

When the shingle-roof rang sharp with the rains,

I heard how he vowed it fast :

While others shook he smiled in the hut,

As he carved me a bowl of the cocoa-nut

Through the roar of the hurricanes.

XII.

I sang his name instead of a song,
Over and over I sang his name,
Upward and downward I drew it along
My various notes,—the same, the same !
I sang it low, that the slave-girls near
Might never guess, from aught they could hear,
It was only a name—a name.

XIII.

I look on the sky and the sea.
We were two to love, and two to pray :
Yes, two, O God, who cried to Thee,
Though nothing didst Thou say !
Coldly Thou sat'st behind the sun :
And now I cry who am but one,
Thou wilt not speak to-day.

XIV.

We were black, we were black,
We had no claim to love and bliss,
What marvel if each went to wrack ?
They wrung my cold hands out of his,
They dragged him—where ? I crawled to touch
His blood's mark in the dust . . . not much,
Ye pilgrim-souls, though plain as *this* !

XV.

Wrong, followed by a deeper wrong !
Mere grief 's too good for such as I
So the white men brought the shame ere long
To strangle the sob of my agony
They would not leave me for my dull
Wet eyes !—it was too merciful
To let me weep pure tears and die.

XVI.

I am black, I am black !
I wore a child upon my breast,
An amulet that hung too slack,
And, in my unrest, could not rest .
Thus we went moaning, child and mother,
One to another, one to another,
Until all ended for the best.

XVII.

For hark ! I will tell you low, low,
I am black, you see,—
And the babe who lay on my bosom so,
Was far too white, too white for me ,
As white as the ladies who scorned to pray
Beside me at church but yesterday,
Though my tears had washed a place for my knee.

XVIII

My own, own child ! I could not bear
To look in his face, it was so white ;
I covered him up with a kerchief there.
I covered his face in close and tight :
And he moaned and struggled, as well might be,
For th'e white child wanted his liberty—
Ha, ha ! he wanted the master-right.

XIX.

He moaned and beat with his head and feet,
His little feet that never grew ;
He struck them out, as it was meet,
Against my heart to break it through :
I might have sung and made him mild,
But I dared not sing to the white-faced child
The only song I knew.

XX.

I pulled the kerchief very close :
He could not see the sun, I swear,
More, then, alive, than now he does
From between the roots of the mango . . . where?
I know where Close ! A child and mother
Do wrong to look at one another
When one is black and one is fair.

XXI

Why, in that single glance I had
Of my child's face, . . . I tell you all,
I saw a look that made me mad !
The *master's* look, that used to fall
On my soul like his lash . . . or worse !
And so, to save it from my curse,
I twisted it round in my shawl.

XXII.

And he moaned and trembled from foot to head,
He shivered from head to foot ;
Till after a time, he lay instead
Too suddenly still and mute.
I felt, beside, a stiffening cold :
I dared to lift up just a fold,
As in lifting a leaf of the mango-fruit.

XXIII

But *my* fruit . . . ha, ha !—there, had been
(I laugh to think on 't at this hour !)
Your fine white angels (who have seen
Nearest the secret of God's power)
And plucked my fruit to make them wine,
And sucked the soul of that child of mine
As the humming-bird sucks the soul of the flower.

XXIV.

Ha, ha, the trick of the angels white !
They freed the white child's spirit so.
I said not a word, but day and night
I carried the body to and fro,
And it lay on my heart like a stone, as chill.
—The sun may shine out as much as he will
I am cold, though it happened a month ago

XXV.

From the white man's house, and the black man's hut,
I carried the little body on ,
The forest's arms did round us shut,
And silence through the trees did run :
They asked no question as I went,
They stood too high for astonishment,
They could see God sit on his throne.

XXVI.

My little body, kerchiefed fast,
I bore it on through the forest, on ;
And when I felt it was tired at last,
I scooped a hole beneath the moon :
Through the forest-tops the angels far,
With a white sharp finger from every star,
Did point and mock at what was done.

XXVII.

Yet when it was all done aight,—

Earth, 'twixt me and my baby, strewed,—

All, changed to black earth,—nothing white,—

A dark child in the dark !—ensued

Some comfort, and my heart grew young ;

I sate down smiling there and sung

The song I learnt in my maidenhood.

XXVIII

And thus we two were reconciled,

The white child and black mother, thus ;

For as I sang it soft and wild,

The same song, more melodious,

Rose from the grave whereon I sate

It was the dead child singing that,

To join the souls of both of us.

XXIX.

I look on the sea and the sky.

Where the pilgrims' ships first anchored lay

The free sun rideth gloriously,

But the pilgrim-ghosts have slid away

Through the earliest streaks of the morn :

My face is black, but it glares with a scorn

Which they dare not meet by day.

XXX

Ha !—in their stead, their hunter sons !

Ha, ha ! they are on me—they hunt in a ring !
Keep off ! I brave you all at once,

I throw off your eyes like snakes that sting !
You have killed the black eagle at nest, I think .
Did you ever stand still in your triumph, and shrink
From the stroke of her wounded wing ?

XXXI.

(Man, drop that stone you dared to lift !—)

I wish you who stand there five abreast.
Each, for his own wife's joy and gift,
A little corpse as safely at rest
As mine in the mangoes ! Yes, but *she*
May keep live babies on her knee,
And sing the song she likes the best.

XXXII.

I am not mad I am black.

I see you staring in my face—
I know you staring, shrinking back,
Ye are born of the Washington-race,
And this land is the free America,
And this mark on my wrist—(I prove what I say)
Ropes tied me up here to the flogging-place.

XXXIII.

You think I shrieked then? Not a sound!

I hung, as a gourd hangs in the sun,
I only cursed them all around

As softly as I might have done
My very own child from these sands
Up to the mountains, lift your hands,
O slaves, and end what I begun!

XXXIV.

Whips, curses, these must answer those!

For in this UNION you have set
Two kinds of men in adverse rows,
Each loathing each, and all forget
The seven wounds in Christ's body fair,
While HE sees gaping everywhere
Our countless wounds that pay no debt.

XXXV.

Our wounds are different. Your white men
Are, after all, not gods indeed,
Nor able to make Christs again
Do good with bleeding. *We* who bleed
(Stand off!) we help not in our loss!
We are too heavy for our cross,
And fall and crush you and your seed.

XXXVI

I fall, I swoon ! I look at the sky.

The clouds are breaking on my brain

I am floated along, as if I should die

Of liberty's exquisite pain.

In the name of the white child waiting for me

In the death-dark where we may kiss and agree,

White men, I leave you all curse-free

In my broken heart's disdain !

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN.

“Φεῦ, φεῦ, τί προσδέρκεσθέ μ’ ὀμμασιν, τέκνα;” — *Μελέτι.*

I.

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
 Ere the sorrow comes with years?
 They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,
 And *that* cannot stop their tears
 The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,
 The young birds are chirping in the nest,
 The young fawns are playing with the shadows,
 The young flowers are blowing toward the west
 But the young, young children, O my brothers,
 They are weeping bitterly!
 They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
 In the country of the free.

II.

Do you question the young children in the sorrow
 Why their tears are falling so?

The old man may weep for his to-morrow
Which is lost in Long Ago ;
The old tree is leafless in the forest,
The old year is ending in the frost,
The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest,
The old hope is hardest to be lost :
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
Do you ask them why they stand
Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,
In our happy Fatherland ?

III.

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their looks are sad to see,
For the man's hoary anguish draws and presses
Down the cheeks of infancy ,
"Your old earth," they say, "is very dreary,
Our young feet," they say, "are very weak ;
Few paces have we taken, yet are weary—
Our grave-rest is very far to seek :
Ask the aged why they weep, and not the children,
For the outside earth is cold,
And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,
And the graves are for the old."

IV.

“True,” say the children, “it may happen
That we die before our time .
Little Alice died last year, her grave is shapen
Like a snowball, in the rime.
We looked into the pit prepared to take her :
Was no room for any work in the close clay !
From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her,
Crying, ‘Get up, little Alice ! it is day.’
If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,
With your ear down, little Alice never cries ;
Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,
For the smile has time for growing in her eyes .
And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in
The shroud by the kirk-chime.
It is good when it happens,” say the children,
“That we die before our time.”

V.

Alas, alas, the children ! they are seeking
Death in life, as best to have :
They are binding up their hearts away from breaking,
With a cerement from the grave.
Go out, children, from the mine and from the city,
Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do ;

Pluck your handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty,
Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through !
But they answer, " Are your cowslips of the meadows
Like our weeds anear the mine ?
Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-shadows,
From your pleasures fair and fine !

VI.

" For oh," say the children, " we are weary,
And we cannot run or leap ;
If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
To drop down in them and sleep.
Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping,
We fall upon our faces, trying to go ,
And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,
The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.
For, all day, we drag our burden tiring
Through the coal-dark, underground ,
Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron
In the factories, round and round.

VII.

" For all day the wheels are droning, turning ;
Their wind comes in our faces,
Till our hearts turn, our heads with pulses burning,
And the walls turn in their places :

Turns the sky in the high window, blank and reeling,
Turns the long light that drops adown the wall,
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling
All are turning, all the day, and we with all
And all day the iron wheels are droning,
And sometimes we could play,
'O ye wheels' (breaking out in a mad moaning),
'Stop ! be silent for to-day ! ' "

VIII.

Ay, be silent ! Let them hear each other breathing
For a moment, mouth to mouth !
Let them touch each other's hands, in a fresh wreathing
Of their tender human youth !
Let them feel that this cold metallic motion
Is not all the life God fashions or reveals :
Let them prove their living souls against the notion
That they live in you, or under you, O wheels !
Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,
Grinding life down from its mark ;
And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,
Spin on blindly in the dark.

IX.

Now tell the poor young children, O my brothers,
To look up to Him and pray ;

So the blessed One who blesseth all the others,
 Will bless them another day.
They answer, "Who is God that He should hear us,
 While the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred ?
When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us
 Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word
And *we* hear not (for the wheels in their resounding)
 Strangers speaking at the door :
Is it likely God, with angels singing round Him,
 Hears our weeping any more?

X.

"Two words, indeed, of praying we remember,
 And at midnight's hour of harm,
'Our Father,' looking upward in the chamber,
 We say softly for a charm.*
We know no other words except 'Our Father,'
 And we think that, in some pause of angels' song,
God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather,
 And hold both within His right hand which is strong

* A fact rendered pathetically historical by Mr Horne's report of his Commission. The name of the poet of "Orion" and "Cosmo de' Medici" has, however, a change of associations, and comes in time to remind me that we have some noble poetic heat of literature still,—however open to the reproach of being somewhat gelid in our humanity
—1844.

ur Father ! ' If He heard us, He would surely
 (For they call Him good and mild)
 swer, smiling down the steep world very purely,
 ' Come and rest with me, my child.'

XI.

But, no ! " say the children, weeping faster,
 " He is speechless as a stone :
 d they tell us, of His image is the master
 Who commands us to work on.
 to ! " say the children,—“ up in Heaven,
 Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find.
 not mock us ; grief has made us unbelieving :
 We look up for God, but tears have made us blind.”
 you hear the children weeping and disproving,
 O my brothers, what ye preach ?
 r God's possible is taught by His world's loving,
 And the children doubt of each.

XII.

d well may the children weep before you !
 They are weary ere they run ;
 ey have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory
 Which is brighter than the sun.
 ey know the grief of man, without its wisdom,
 They sink in man's despair, without its calm ;

Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom,
Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm ·
Are worn as if with age, yet unretrievingly
The harvest of its memories cannot reap,—
Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly.
Let them weep ! let them weep !

XIII.

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their look is dread to see,
For they mind you of their angels in high places,
With eyes turned on Deity.
“How long,” they say, “how long, O cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world, on a child’s heart,—
Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitantion,
And tread onward to your throne amid the mart ?
Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,
And your purple shows your path !
But the child’s sob in the silence curses deeper
Than the strong man in his wrath.”

A CHILD ASLEEP.

I

How he sleepeth, having drunken
 Weary childhood's mandragore †
 From its pretty eyes have sunken
 Pleasures to make room for more ;
 Near the withered nosegay which he pulled the
 day before.

II.

Nosegays † leave them for the waking ;
 Throw them earthward where they grew ;
 Dim are such beside the breaking
 Amaranths he looks unto :
 eyes see brighter colours than the open ever do

III.

Heaven-flowers, rayed by shadows golden
 From the palms they sprang beneath,
 Now perhaps divinely holden,

Swing against him in a wreath :
We may think so from the quickening of his bloom and
of his breath.

IV.

Vision unto vision calleth
While the young child dreameth on :
Fair, O dreamer, thee befalleth
With the glory thou hast won !
Darker wast thou in the garden yestermorn by summer sun.

V.

We should see the spirits ringing
Round thee, were the clouds away :
'T is the child-heart draws them, singing
In the silent-seeming clay—
Singing ! stars that seem the mutest go in music all the way.

VI.

As the moths around a taper,
As the bees around a rose,
As the gnats around a vapour,
So the spirits group and close
Round about a holy childhood as if drinking its repose.

VII.

Shapes of brightness overlean thee,
Flash their diadems of youth
On the ringlets which half screen thee,
While thou smilest . . . not in sooth
Thy smile, but the overfair one, dropt from some ethereal
mouth.

VIII.

Haply it is angels' duty,
During slumber, shade by shade
To fine down this childish beauty
To the thing it must be made
Ere the world shall bring it praises, or the tomb shall see
it fade.

IX.

Softly, softly ! make no noises !
Now he lieth dead and dumb ;
Now he hears the angels' voices
Folding silence in the room
Now he muses deep the meaning of the Heaven-words
as they come.

X.

Speak not ' he is consecrated ;
Breathe no breath across his eyes :
Lifted up and separated
On the hand of God he lies
In a sweetness beyond touching, held in cloistral sanctities.

XI

Could ye bless him, father—mother,
Bless the dimple in his cheek ?
Dare ye look at one another
And the benediction speak ?
Would ye not break out in weeping and confess yourselves too weak ?

XII

He is harmless, ye are sinful ;
Ye are troubled, he at ease ;
From his slumber virtue winful
Floweth outward with increase.
Dare not bless him ' but be blessed by his peace, and go
in peace.

THE FOURFOLD ASPECT.

I.

WHEN ye stood up in the house
 With your little childish feet,
 And, in touching Life's first shows,
 First the touch of Love did meet,—
 Love and Nearness seeming one,
 By the heartlight cast before,
 And of all Beloveds, none
 Standing farther than the door ;
 Not a name being dear to thought,
 With its owner beyond call ;
 Not a face, unless it brought
 Its own shadow to the wall ;
 When the worst recorded change
 Was of apple dropt from bough,
 When love's sorrow seemed more strange
 Than love's treason can seem now,—
 Then, the Loving took you up
 Soft, upon their eldci knees,

Telling why the statues droop
Underneath the churchyard trees,
And how ye must lie beneath them
Through the winters long and deep,
Till the last trump overbreathe them,
And ye smile out of your sleep.
Oh, ye lifted up your head, and it seemed as if they said
A tale of fairy ships
With a swan-wing for a sail ;
Oh, ye kissed their loving lips
For the merry merry tale—
So carelessly ye thought upon the Dead !

II.

Soon ye read in solemn stories
Of the men of long ago,
Of the pale bewildering glories
Shining farther than we know ;
Of the heroes with the laurel,
Of the poets with the bay,
Of the two worlds' earnest quarrel
For that beauteous Helena ;
How Achilles at the portal
Of the tent heard footsteps nigh,
And his strong heart, half-immortal,
Met the *kenta* with a cry ;

How Ulysses left the sunlight
For the pale eidola race
Blank and passive through the dun light,
Staring blindly in his face ,
How that true wife said to Pœtus,
With calm smile and wounded heart,
“Sweet, it hurts not !” How Admetus
Saw his blessed one depart ,
How King Arthur proved his mission,
And Sir Roland wound his horn,
And at Sangreal’s moony vision
Swords did bristle round like corn.
Oh, ye lifted up your head, and it seemed, the while ye read,
That this Death, then, must be found
A Valhalla for the crowned,
The heroic who prevail .
None, be sure can enter in
Far below a paladin
Of a noble noble tale—
So awfully ye thought upon the Dead !

III.

Ay, but soon ye woke up shrieking,
As a child that wakes at night
From a dream of sisters speaking
In a garden’s summer-light,—

That wakes, starting up and bounding,
In a lonely lonely bed,
With a wall of darkness round him,
Stifling black about his head !
And the full sense of your mortal
Rushed upon you deep and loud,
And ye heard the thunder hurtle
From the silence of the cloud.
Funeral-torches at your gateway
Threw a dreadful light within.
All things changed · you rose up straightway,
And saluted Death and Sin.
Since, your outward man has rallied,
And your eye and voice grown bold ;
Yet the Sphinx of Life stands pallid,
With her saddest secret told.
Happy places have grown holy
If ye went where once ye went,
Only tears would fall down slowly,
As at solemn sacrament.
Merry books, once read for pastime,
If ye dared to read again,
Only memories of the last time
Would swim darkly up the brain
Household names, which used to flutter
Through your laughter unawares,—

God's Divinest ye could utter
With less trembling in your prayers
Ye have dropt adown your head, and it seems as if ye
tread
On your own hearts in the path
Ye are called to in His wrath,
And your prayers go up in wail
—"Dost Thou see, then, all our loss,
O Thou agonized on cross ?
Art thou reading all its tale ?"
So mournfully ye think upon the Dead !

IV.

Pray, pray, thou who also weepst,
And the drops will slacken so
Weep, weep, and the watch thou keepest
With a quicker count will go.
Think : the shadow on the dial
For the nature most undone,
Marks the passing of the trial,
Proves the presence of the sun.
Look, look up, in starry passion,
To the throne above the spheres :
Learn . the spirit's gravitation
Still must differ from the tear's

Hope with all the strength thou usest

In embracing thy despair

Love · the earthly love thou lovest

Shall return to thee more fair.

Work make clear the forest-tangles

Of the wildest stranger-land

Trust the blessèd deathly angels

Whisper, "Sabbath hours at hand !"

By the heart's wound when most gory,

By the longest agony,

Smile ! Behold in sudden glory

The TRANSFIGURED smiles on *thee* !

And ye lifted up your head, and it seemed as if He said,

"My Belovèd, is it so ?

Have ye tasted of my woe ?

Of my Heaven ye shall not fail !"

He stands brightly where the shade is,

With the keys of Death and Hades,

And there, ends the mournful tale—

So hopefully ye think upon the Dead !

NIGHT AND THE MERRY MAN.

NIGHT.

'NEATH my moon what doest thou,
 With a somewhat paler brow
 Than she giveth to the ocean?
 He, without a pulse or motion,
 Muttering low before her stands,
 Lifting his invoking hands
 Like a seer before a sprite,
 To catch her oracles of light:
 But thy soul out-trembles now
 Many pulses on thy brow.
 Where be all thy laughs clear,
 Others laughed alone to hear?
 Where thy quaint jests, said for fame?
 Where thy dances, mixed with game?
 Where thy festive companies,
 Moonèd o'er with ladies' eyes
 All more bright for thee, I trow?
 'Neath my moon what doest thou?

THE MERRY MAN.

I am digging my warm heart
Till I find its coldest part ;
I am digging wide and low,
Further than a spade will go,
Till that, when the pit is deep
And large enough, I there may heap
All my present pain and past
Joy, dead things that look aghast
By the daylight now 't is done.
Throw them in, by one and one !
I must laugh, at rising sun.

Memories—of fancy's golden
Treasures which my hands have holden,
Till the chillness made them ache ,
Of childhood's hopes that used to wake
If birds were in a singing strain,
And for less cause, sleep again ;
Of the moss-seat in the wood
Where I trysted solitude ,
Of the hill-top where the wind

Used to follow me behind,
Then in sudden rush to blind
Both my glad eyes with my hair,
Taken gladly in the snare ;
Of the climbing up the rocks,
Of the playing 'neath the oaks
Which retain beneath them now
Only shadow of the bough ;
Of the lying on the grass
While the clouds did overpass,
Only they, so lightly driven,
Seeming betwixt me and Heaven ;
Of the little prayers serene,
Murmuring of earth and sin ;
Of large-leaved philosophy
Leaning from my childish knee ;
Of poetic book sublime,
Soul-kissed for the first dear time,
Greek or English, ere I knew
Life was not a poem too :—
Throw them in, by one and one !
I must laugh, at rising sun.

—Of the glorious ambitions
Yet unquenched by their fruitions

Of the reading out the nights ;
Of the straining at mad heights ;
Of achievements, less descried
By a dear few than magnified ,
Of praises from the many earned
When praise from love was undiscerned ;
Of the sweet reflecting gladness
Softened by itself to sadness :—
Throw them in, by one and one !
I must laugh, at rising sun.

What are these ? more, more than these !
Throw in dearer memories !—
Of voices whereof but to speak
Makes mine own all sunk and weak ,
Of smiles the thought of which is sweeping
All my soul to floods of weeping ,
Of looks whose absence fain would weigh
My looks to the ground for aye ;
Of clasping hands—ah me, I wring
Mine, and in a tremble fling
Downward, downward all this paining !
Partings with the sting remaining,
Meetings with a deeper throe
Since the joy is ruined so,

Changes with a fiery burning,
(Shadows upon all the turning,) Thoughts of . . . with a storm they came,
Them I have not breath to name :
Downward, downward be they cast
In the pit ! and now at last
My work beneath the moon is done,
And I shall laugh, at rising sun.

But let me pause or ere I cover
All my treasures darkly over :
I will speak not in thine ears,
Only tell my beaded tears
Silently, most silently
When the last is calmly told,
Let that same moist rosary
With the rest sepulchred be,
Finished now ! The darksome mould
Sealeth up the darksome pit.
I will lay no stone on it,
Grasses I will sow instead,
Fit for Queen Titania's tread ,
Flowers, encoloured with the sun,
And *at at* written upon none ;
Thus, whenever saileth by
The Lady World of dainty eye,

Not a grief shall here remain,
Silken shoon to damp or stain :
And while she lisps, "I have not seen
Any place more smooth and clean" . . .
Here she cometh !—Ha, ha !—who
Laughs as loud as I can do ?

EARTH AND HER PRAISERS.

I.

THE Earth is old ;
 Six thousand winters make her heart a-cold ;
 The sceptre slanteth from her palsied hold.
 She saith, “ ’Las me ! God’s word that I was ‘good’
 Is taken back to heaven,
 From whence when any sound comes, I am riven
 By some sharp bolt ; and now no angel would
 Descend with sweet dew-silence on my mountains,
 To glorify the lovely river fountains
 That gush along their side :
 I see—O weary change !—I see instead
 This human wrath and pride,
 These thrones and tombs, judicial wrong and blood,
 And bitter words are poured upon mine head—
 ‘ O Earth ! thou art a stage for tricks unholy,
 A church for most remorseful melancholy ,
 Thou art so spoilt, we should forget we had
 An Eden in thee, wert thou not so sad !’

Sweet children, I am old ' ye, every one,
Do keep me from a portion of my sun.

Give praise in change for brightness '
That I may shake my hills in infiniteness
Of breezy laughter, as in youthful mirth,
To hear Earth's sons and daughters praising I

II.

Whereupon a child began
With spirit running up to man
As by angels' shining ladder,
(May he find no cloud above ')
Seeming he had ne'er been sadder
All his days than now,
Sitting in the chestnut grove,
With that joyous overflow
Of smiling from his mouth o'er brow
And cheek and chin, as if the breeze
Leaning tricksy from the trees
To part his golden hairs, had blown
Into an hundred smiles that one.

III

"O rare, rare Earth ' " he saith,
"I will praise thee presently ;
Not to-day ; I have no breath .
I have hunted squirrels three—

Two ran down in the furzy hollow
Where I could not see nor follow,
One sits at the top of the filbert-tree,
With a yellow nut and a mock at me
 Presently it shall be done !
When I see which way these two have run,
When the mocking one at the filbert-top
Shall leap a-down and beside me stop,
 Then, rare Earth, rare Earth,
Will I pause, having known thy worth,
 To say all good of thee ! ”

IV.

Next a lover,—with a dream
’Neath his waking eyelids hidden,
And a frequent sigh unbidden,
And an idlesse all the day
Beside a wandering stream,
And a silence that is made
Of a word he dares not say,—
Shakes slow his pensive head :
 “ Earth, Earth ! ” saith he,
“ If spirits, like thy roses, grew
On one stalk, and winds austere
Could but only blow them near,
 To share each other’s dew ;—

If, when summer rains agree
 To beautify thy hills, I knew
 Looking off them I might see
 Some one very beauteous too,—
 Then Earth," saith he,
 "I would praise . . . nay, nay—not I

v.

Will the pedant name her next?
 Crabbèd with a crabbèd text
 Sits he in his study nook,
 With his elbow on a book,
 And with stately crossèd knees,
 And a wrinkle deeply thrud
 Through his lowering brow,
 Caused by making proofs enow
 That Plato in "Parmenides"
 Meant the same Spinoza did,—
 Or, that an hundred of the groping
 Like himself, had made one Homer,
Homeros being a misnomer
 What hath *he* to do with praise
 Of Earth or aught? Whene'er the slop
 Sunbeams through his window daze
 His eyes off from the learned phrase,
 Straightway he draws close the curtain

EARTH AND HER PRAISERS

May abstraction keep him dumb !
Were his lips to ope, 't is certain
“ *Derivatum est* ” would come.

VI.

Then a mourner moveth pale
In a silence full of wail,
Raising not his sunken head
Because he wandered last that way
With that one beneath the clay :
Weeping not, because that one,
The only one who would have said
“ Cease to weep, beloved ! ” has gon
Whence returneth comfort none.
The silence breaketh suddenly,—
“ Earth, I praise thee ! ” crieth he,
“ Thou hast a grave for also *me*.”

VII.

Ha, a poet ! know him by
The ecstasy-dilated eye,
Not uncharged with tears that ran
Upward from his heart of man ;
By the cheek, from hour to hour,
Kindled bright or sunken wan
With a sense of lonely power ;
By the brow uplifted higher

Than others, for more low declining
By the lip which words of fire
Overboiling have burned white
While they gave the nations light ·
Ay, in every time and place
Ye may know the poet's face
By the shade or shining.

VIII.

'Neath a golden cloud he stands,
Spreading his impassioned hands.
"O God's Earth!" he saith, "the sig
From the Father-soul to mine
Of all beauteous mysteries,
Of all perfect images
Which, divine in His divine,
In my human only are
Very excellent and fair!
Think not, Earth, that I would raise
Weary forehead in thy praise,
(Weary, that I cannot go
Farther from thy region low,)
If were struck no richer meanings
From thee than thyself. The leaning
Of the close trees o'er the brim
Of a sunshine-haunted stream

EARTH AND HER PRAISERS

Have a sound beneath their leaves,
Not of wind, not of wind,
Which the poet's voice achieves :
The faint mountains, heaped behind,
Have a falling on their tops,
Not of dew, not of dew,
Which the poet's fancy drops :
Viewless things his eyes can view,
Driftings of his dream do light
All the skies by day and night,
And the seas that deepest roll
Carry murmurs of his soul.
Earth, I praise thee ! praise thou *me !*
God perfecteth his creation
With this recipient poet-passion,
And makes the beautiful to be.
I praise thee, O beloved sign,
From the God-soul unto mine !
Praise me, that I cast on thee
The cunning sweet interpretation,
The help and glory and dilation
Of mine immortality ! ”

IX.

There was silence. None did dare
To use again the spoken air

Of that far-charming voice, or
A Christian resting on the hill
With a thoughtful smile subdued
(Seeming learnt in solitude)
Which a weeper might have vain
Without a few tears, did softly
And looked up unto heaven afar
While he praised the Earth—

I count the praises thou art won
By thy waves that move aloud
By thy hills against the cloud,
By thy valleys warm and green
By the copses' elms between,
By their birds which, like a spirit
Scattered by a strong delight
Into fragments musical,
Stir and sing in every bush,
By thy silver founts that fall,
As if to entice the stars at night
To thine heart, by grass and rye
And little weeds the children play
Mistook for flowers!

—Oh, be
Art thou, Earth, albeit worse
Than in heaven is called good!

Good to us, that we may know
Meekly from thy good to go ;
While the holy, crying Blood
Puts its music kind and low
'Twixt such ears as are not dull,
And thine ancient curse !

X.

“ Praised be the mosses soft
In thy forest pathways oft,
And the thorns, which make us think
Of the thornless river-brink
Where the ransomed tread .
Praised be thy sunny gleams,
And the storm, that worketh dreams
Of calm unfinished .
Praised be thine active days,
And thy night-time's solemn need,
When in God's dear book we read
No night shall be therein
Praised be thy dwellings warm
By household faggot's cheerful blaze,
Where, to hear of pardoned sin,
Pauseth oft the merry din,
Save the babe's upon the arm
Who croweth to the crackling wood :

Yea, and, better understood,
Praisèd be thy dwellings cold,
Hid beneath the churchyard mould,
Where the bodies 'of the saints
Separate from earthly taints
Lie asleep, in blessing bound,
Waiting for the trumpet's sound
To free them into blessing ;—none
Weeping more beneath the sun,
Though dangerous words of human love
Be graven very near, above.

XI.

“Earth, we Christians praise thee thus,
Even for the change that comes
With a grief from thee to us ·
For thy cradles and thy tombs,
For the pleasant corn and wine
And summer-heat , and also for
The frost upon the sycamore
And hail upon the vine !”

THE VIRGIN MARY TO THE CHILD JESUS.

But see the Virgin blest
Hath laid her babe to rest

MILTON'S *Hymn on the Nativity*.

I.

SLEEP, sleep, mine Holy One !
My flesh, my Lord !—what name ? I do not know
A name that seemeth not too high or low,
Too far from me or heaven :
My Jesus, *that* is best ! that word being given
By the majestic angel whose command
Was softly as a man's beseeching said,
When I and all the earth appeared to stand
In the great overflow
Of light celestial from his wings and head.
Sleep, sleep, my saving One !

II.

And art Thou come for saving, baby-browed
And speechless Being—art Thou come for saving ?

The palm that grows beside our door is bowed ,
 By trêdings of the low wind from the south,
 A restless shadow through the chamber waving .
 Upon its bough a bird sings in the sun,
 But Thou, with that close slumber on Thy mouth,
 Dost seem of wind and sun already weary.
 Art come for saving, O my weary One ?

III.

Perchance this sleep that shutteth out the dreary
 Earth-sounds and motions, opens on Thy soul
 High dreams on fire with God ;
 High songs that make the pathways where they roll
 More bright than stars do theirs ; and visions new
 Of Thine eternal Nature's old abode
 Suffer this mother's kiss,
 Best thing that earthly is,
 To glide the music and the glory through,
 Nor narrow in Thy dream the broad upliftings
 Of any seraph wing.
 Thus noiseless, thus Sleep, sleep my dreaming One !

IV.

The slumber of His lips meseems to run
 Through *my* lips to mine heart, to all its shiftings
 Of sensual life, bringing contrariousness

In a great calm I feel I could lie down
As Moses did, and die,*—and then live most.
I am 'ware of you, heavenly Presences,
That stand with your peculiar light unlost,
Each forehead with a high thought for a crown,
Unsunned i' the sunshine! I am 'ware Ye throw
No shade against the wall! How motionless
Ye round me with your living statuary,
While through your whiteness, in and outwardly,
Continual thoughts of God appear to go,
Like light's soul in itself. I bear, I bear
To look upon the dropt lids of your eyes,
Though their external shining testifies
To that beatitude within which were
Enough to blast an eagle at his sun:
I fall not on my sad clay face before ye,—
I look on His I know
My spirit which dilateth with the woe
Of His mortality,
May well contain your glory.
Yea, drop your lids more low.
Ye are but fellow-worshippers with me!
Sleep, sleep, my worshipped One!

* It is a Jewish tradition that Moses died of the kisses of God's lips.

V

We sate among the stalls at Bethlehem ;
 The dumb kine from their fodder turning th
 Softened their hornèd faces
 To almost human gazes
 Toward the newly Born :
 The simple shepherds from the star-lit brook
 Brought visionary looks,
 As yet in their astonished heaving rung
 The strange sweet angel-tongue :
 The magi of the East, in sandals worn,
 Knelt reverent, sweeping round,
 With long pale beards, their gifts upon the
 The incense, myrrh and gold
 These baby hands were impotent to hold :
 So let all earthlies and celestials wait
 Upon Thy royal state
 Sleep, sleep, my kingly One !

VI

I am not proud—meek angels, ye invest
 New meeknesses to hear such utterance rest
 On mortal lips,—“I am not proud”—*not proud*
 Albeit in my flesh God sent His Son,
 Albeit over Him my head is bowed

As others bow before Him, still mine heart
Bows lower than their knees. O centuries
That roll in vision your futurities

My future grave athwart,—
Whose murmurs seem to reach me while I keep
Watch o'er this sleep,—
Say of me as the Heavenly said—"Thou art
The blessedest of women!"—blessedest,
Not holiest, not noblest, no high name
Whose height misplaced may pierce me like a shame
When I sit meek in heaven!

For me, for me,
God knows that I am feeble like the rest!
I often wandered forth, more child than maiden
Among the midnight hills of Galilee

Whose summits looked heaven-laden,
Listening to silence as it seemed to be
God's voice, so soft yet strong, so fain to press
Upon my heart as heaven did on the height,
And waken up its shadows by a light,
And show its vileness by a holiness
Then I knelt down most silent like the night,
Too self-renounced for fears,
Raising my small face to the boundless blue
Whose stars did mix and tremble in my tears
God heard *them* falling after, with His dew.

VII.

So, seeing my corruption, can I see
 This Incorruptible now born of me,
 This fair new Innocence no sun did chance
 To shine on, (for even Adam was no child,)
 Created from my nature all defiled,
 This mystery, from out mine ignorance,—
 Nor feel the blindness, stain, corruption, more
 Than others do, or *I* did heretofore?
 Can hands wherein such burden pure has been
 Not open with the cry “unclean, unclean,”
 More oft than any else beneath the skies?

Ah King, ah, Christ, ah son!
 The kine, the shepherds, the abased wise
 Must all less lowly wait
 Than I, upon Thy state
 Sleep, sleep, my kingly One!

VIII.

Art Thou a King, then? Come, His univers
 Come, crown me Him a King!
 Pluck rays from all such stars as never fling
 Their light where fell a curse,
 And make a crowning for this kingly brow!—
 What is my word? Each empyreal star

Sits in a sphere afar
In shining ambuscade :
The child-brow, crowned by none,
Keeps its unchildlike shade.
Sleep, sleep, my crownless One !

IX

Unchildlike shade ! No other babe doth wear
An aspect very sorrowful, as Thou
No small babe-smiles my watching heart has seen
To float like speech the speechless lips between,
No dovelike cooing in the golden air,
No quick short joys of leaping babyhood
Alas, our earthly good
In heaven thought evil, seems too good for Thee
Yet, sleep, my weary One !

X.

And then the drear sharp tongue of prophecy,
With the dread sense of things which shall be done,
Doth smite me inly, like a sword a sword ?
That "smites the Shepherd." Then, I think aloud
The words "despised,"—"rejected,"—every word
Recoiling into darkness as I view
The DARLING on my knee.

Bright angels,—move not—lest ye stir the cloud
Betwixt my soul and His futurity !

I must not die, with mother's work to do,
And could not live—and see.

XI.

It is enough to bear
This image still and fair,
This holier in sleep
Than a saint at prayer,
This aspect of a child
Who never sinned or smiled ;
This Presence in an infant's face ;
This sadness most like love,
This love than love more deep,
This weakness like omnipotence
It is so strong to move.

Awful is this watching place,
Awful what I see from hence—
A king, without regalia,
A God, without the thunder,
A child, without the heart for play ;
Ay, a Creator, rent asunder
From His first glory and cast away
On His own world, for me alone
To hold in hands created, crying—Son !

XII.

That tear fell not on Thee,
Beloved, yet thou stirrest in thy slumber !
THOU, stirring not for glad sounds out of number
Which through the vibratory palm-trees run
From summer-wind and bird,
So quickly hast thou heard
A tear fall silently ?
Wak'st thou, O loving One?—

AN ISLAND.

All goeth but Goddis will.—OLD POET.

I.

My dream is of an island-place
Which distant seas keep lonely,
A little island on whose face
The stars are watchers only :
Those bright still stars ! they need not seem
Brighter or stiller in my dream.

II.

An island full of hills and dells,
All rumped and uneven
With green recesses, sudden swells,
And odorous valleys driven
So deep and straight that always there
The wind is cradled to soft air.

III.

Hills running up to heaven for light
Through woods that half-way ran,
As if the wild earth mimicked right
The wilder heart of man :
Only it shall be greener far
And gladder than hearts ever are.

IV.

More like, perhaps, that mountain piece
Of Dante's paradise,
Disrupt to an hundred hills like these,
In falling from the skies ;
Bringing within it, all the roots
Of heavenly trees and flowers and fruits .

V.

For—saving where the grey rocks strike
Their javelins up the azure,
Or where deep fissures miser-like
Hoard up some fountain treasure,
(And e'en in them, stoop down and hear,
Leaf sounds with water in your ear,—)

VI.

The place is all awave with trees,
Limes, myrtles purple-beaded,
Acacias having drunk the lees
Of the night-dew, faint-headed,
And wan grey olive-woods which seem
The fittest foliage for a dream.

VII.

Trees, trees on all sides ! they combine
Their plummy shades to throw,
Through whose clear fruit and blossom fine
Whene'er the sun may go,
The ground beneath he deeply stains,
As passing through cathedral panes.

VIII.

But little needs this earth of ours
That shining from above her,
When many Pleiades of flowers
(Not one lost) star her over,
The rays of their unnumbered hues
Being all refracted by the dews.

IX.

Wide-petalled plants that boldly drink
The Amreeta of the sky,
Shut bells that dull with rapture sink,
And lolling buds, half shy ,
I cannot count them, but between
Is room for grass and mosses green,

X

And brooks, that glass in different strengths
All colours in disorder,
Or, gathering up their silver lengths
Beside their winding border,
Sleep, haunted through the slumber hidden,
By lilies white as dreams in Eden.

XI.

Nor think each archèd tree with each
Too closely interlaces
To admit of vistas out of reach,
And broad moon-lighted places
Upon whose sward the antlered deer
May view their double image clear.

XII.

For all this island 's creature-full,
 (Kept happy not by halves)
Mild cows, that at the vine-wreaths pu
 Then low back at their calves
With tender lowings, to approve
The warm mouths milking them for lo

XIII.

Free gamesome horses, antelopes,
 And harmless leaping leopards,
And buffaloes upon the slopes,
 And sheep unrul'd by shepherds :
Hares, lizards, hedgehogs, badgers, mu
Snakes, squirrels, frogs, and butterflies.

XIV

And birds that live there in a crowd,
 Horned owls, rapt nightingales,
Larks bold with heaven, and peacocks
 Self-sphered in those grand tails ,
All creatures glad and safe, I deem
No guns nor springes in my dream !

XV.

The island's edges are a-wing
With trees that overbranch
The sea with song-birds welcoming
The curlews to green change;
And doves from half-closed lids espy
The red and purple fish go by.

XVI.

One dove is answering in trust
The water every minute,
Thinking so soft a murmur must
Have her mate's cooing in it:
So softly doth earth's beauty round
Infuse itself in ocean's sound.

XVII

My sanguine soul bounds forwarder
To meet the bounding waves,
Beside them straightway I repair,
To live within the caves.
And near me two or three may dwell
Whom dreams fantastic please as well

XVIII

Long winding caverns, glittering far
 Into a crystal distance !
Through clefts of which shall many a star
 Shine clear without resistance,
And carry down its rays the smell
Of flowers above invisible

XIX.

I said that two or three might choose
 Their dwelling near mine own
Those who would change man's voice and use,
 For Nature's way and tone—
Man's veering heart and careless eyes,
For Nature's steadfast sympathies

XX.

Ourselves, to meet her faithfulness,
 Shall play a faithful part ,
Her beautiful shall ne'er address
 The monstrous at our heart
Her musical shall ever touch
Something within us also such.

XXI

Yet shall she not our mistress live,
As doth the moon of ocean,
Though gently as the moon she give
Our thoughts a light and motion
More like a harp of many lays,
Moving its master while he plays.

XXII.

No sod in all that island doth
Yawn open for the dead ;
No wind hath borne a traitor's oath ,
No earth, a mourner's tread ,
We cannot say by stream or shade,
“ I suffered *here*,—was *here* betrayed ”

XXIII.

Our only “farewell ” we shall laugh
To shifting cloud or hour,
And use our only epitaph
To some bud turned a flower :
Our only tears shall serve to prove
Excess in pleasure or in love.

XXIV.

Our fancies shall their plumage catch
From fairest island-birds,
Whose eggs let young ones out at hatch,
Born singing ! then our words
Unconsciously shall take the dyes
Of those prodigious fantasies.

XXV.

Yea, soon, no consonant unsmooth
Our smile-tuned lips shall reach ;
Sounds sweet as Hellas spake in youth
Shall glide into our speech :
(What music, certes, can you find
As soft as voices which are kind ?)

XXVI.

And often, by the joy without
And in us, overcome,
We, through our musing, shall let float
Such poems,—sitting dumb,—
As Pindar might have writ if he
Had tended sheep in Arcady ;

XXVII.

Or Æschylus—the pleasant fields
He died in, longer knowing,
Or Homer, had men's sins and shields
Been lost in Meles flowing,
Or Poet Plato, had the undim
Unsetting Godlight broke on him.

XXVIII.

Choose me the cave most worthy choice,
To make a place for prayer,
And I will choose a praying voice
To pour our spirits there:
How silverly the echoes run!
Thy will be done,—thy will be done.

XXIX.

Gently yet strangely uttered words!
They lift me from my dream;
The island fadeth with its swards
That did no more than seem.
The streams are dry, no sun could find—
The fruits are fallen, without wind.

XXX.

So oft the doing of God's will
Our foolish wills undoeth !
And yet what idle dream breaks ill,
Which morning-light subdueth ?
And who would murmur and misdoubt,
When God's great sunrise finds him out ?

THE SOUL'S TRAVELLING.

Ἦδη νοερούς
Πέτασαι ταρσούς.

SYNESIUS.

I.

I DWELL amid the city ever.
The great humanity which beats
Its life along the stony streets,
Like a strong and unsunned river
In a self-made course,
I sit and hearken while it rolls.
Very sad and very hoarse
Certes is the flow of souls ;
Infinitest tendencies
By the finite prest and pent,
In the finite, turbulent .
How we tremble in surprise
When sometimes, with an awful sound,
God's great plummet strikes the ground !

II.

The champ of the steeds on the silver bit,
As they whirl the rich man's carriage by,
The beggar's whine as he looks at it,—
But it goes too fast for charity;
The trail on the street of the poor man's broom,
That the lady who walks to her palace-home,
On her silken skirt may catch no dust;
The tread of the business-men who must
Count their per-cents by the paces they take;
The cry of the babe unheard of its mother
Though it lie on her breast, while she thinks of the
other

Laid yesterday where it will not wake;
The flower-girl's prayer to buy roses and pinks
Held out in the smoke, like stars by day;
The gin-door's oath that hollowly chinks
Guilt upon grief and wrong upon hate;
The cabman's cry to get out of the way;
The dustman's call down the area-grate;
The young maid's jest, and the old wife's scold,
The haggling talk of the boys at a stall,
The fight in the street, which is backed for gold,
The plea of the lawyers in Westminster Hall;
The drop on the stones of the blind man's staff

As he trades in his own grief's sacredness,
The brothel shriek, and the Newgate laugh,
The hum upon 'Change, and the organ's grinding,
(The grinder's face being nevertheless
Dry and vacant of even woe
While the children's hearts are leaping so
At the merry music's winding,)
The black-plumed funeral's creeping train,
Long and slow (and yet they will go
As fast as Life though it hurry and strain ')
Creeping the populous houses through
And nodding their plumes at either side,—
At many a house, where an infant, new
To the sunshiny world, has just struggled and cried,—
At many a house where sitteth a bride
Trying to-morrow's coronals
With a scarlet blush to-day:
 Slowly creep the funerals,
As none should hear the noise and say
"The living, the living must go away
 To multiply the dead "
 Hark ! an upward shout is sent,
In grave strong joy from tower to steeple
 The bells ring out,
The trumpets sound, the people shout,
The young queen goes to her Parliament.

She turneth round her large blue eyes
More bright with childish memories
Than royal hopes, upon the people ;
On either side she bows her head
 Lowly, with a queenly grace
And smile most trusting-innocent,
As if she smiled upon her mother ;
The thousands press before each other
 To bless her to her face ;
And booms the deep majestic voice
Through trump and drum,—“ May the queen rejoice
 In the people's liberties ! ”

III.

I dwell amid the city,
And hear the flow of souls in act and speech,
For pomp or trade, for merrymake or folly :
I hear the confluence and sum of each,
 And that is melancholy !
Thy voice is a complaint, O crownèd city,
The blue sky covering thee like God's great pity.

IV.

O blue sky ! it mindeth me
Of places where I used to see

Its vast unbroken circle thrown
From the far pale-peakèd hill
Out to the last veige of ocean,
As by God's arm it were done
Then for the first time, with the emotion
Of that first impulse on it still
Oh, we spiits fly at will
Faster than the wingèd steed
Whereof in old book we read,
With the sunlight foaming back
From his flanks to a misty wrack,
And his nostril reddening proud
As he breasteth the steep thundercloud,—
Smoother than Sabrina's chair
Gliding up from wave to air,
While she smileth debonair
Yet holy, coldly and yet brightly,
Like her own mooned waters nightly,
Through her dripping hair.

v.

Very fast and smooth we fly,
Spirits, though the flesh be by ;
All looks feed not from the eye
Nor all hearings from the ear :

We can hearken and espy
Without either, we can journey
Bold and gay as knight to tourney,
And, though we wear no visor down
To dark our countenance, the foe
Shall never chafe us as we go.

VI.

I am gone from peopled town !
It passeth its street-thunder round
My body which yet hears no sound,
For now another sound, another
Vision, my soul's senses have—
O'er a hundred valleys deep
Where the hills' green shadows sleep
Scarce known because the valley-trees
Cross those upland images,
O'er a hundred hills each other
Watching to the western wave,
I have travelled,—I have found
The silent, lone, remembered ground.

VII.

I have found a grassy niche
Hollowed in a seaside hill,

As if the ocean-grandeur which
Is aspectable from the place,
Had struck the hill as with a mace
Sudden and cleaving You might fill
That little nook with the little cloud
Which sometimes lieth by the moon
To beautify a night of June ;
A cavelike nook which, opening all
To the wide sea, is disallowed
From its own earth's sweet pastoral :
Cavelike, but roofless overhead
And made of verdant banks instead
Of any rocks, with flowerets spread
Instead of spar and stalactite,
Cowslips and daisies gold and white .
Such pretty flowers on such green sward,
You think the sea they look toward
Doth serve them for another sky
As warm and blue as that on high.

VIII.

And in this hollow is a seat,
And when you shall have crept to it,
Slipping down the banks too steep
To be o'erbrowzèd by the sheep,

Do not think—though at your feet
The cliff's disrupt—you shall behold
The line where earth and ocean meet ;
You sit too much above to view
The solemn confluence of the two :
You can hear them as they greet,
You can hear that evermore
Distance-softened noise more old
Than Nereid's singing, the tide spent
Joining soft issues with the shore
In harmony of discontent,
And when you hearken to the grave
Lamenting of the underwave,
You must believe in earth's communion
Albeit you witness not the union.

IX.

Except that sound, the place is full
Of silences, which when you cull
By any word, it thrills you so
That presently you let them grow
To meditation's fullest length
Across your soul with a soul's strength
And as they touch your soul, they borrow

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Both of its grandeur and its sorrow,
That deathly odour which the clay
Leaves on its deathlessness alway.

X.

Alway ! alway ? must this be ?
Rapid Soul from city gone,
Dost thou carry inwardly
What doth make the city's moan ?
Must this deep sigh of thine own
Haunt thee with humanity ?
Green visioned banks that are too steep
To be o'erbrowzèd by the sheep,
May all sad thoughts adown you creep
Without a shepherd ? Mighty sea,
Can we dwarf thy magnitude
And fit it to our straitest mood ?
O fair, fair Nature, are we thus
Impotent and querulous
Among thy workings glorious,
Wealth and sanctities, that still
Leave us vacant and defiled
And wailing like a soft-kissed child,
Kissed soft against his will ?

XI.

God, God !

With a child's voice I cry,

Weak, sad, confidingly—

God, God !

Thou knowest, eyelids, raised not always up
Unto Thy love, (as none of ours are) droop

As ours, o'er many a tear ;

Thou knowest, though Thy universe is broad,

Two little tears suffice to cover all :

Thou knowest, Thou who art so prodigal

Of beauty, we are oft but stricken deer

Expiring in the woods, that care for none

Of those delightful flowers they die upon

XII.

O blissful Mouth which breathed the mournful breath
We name our souls, self-spoilt !—by that strong passion
Which paled Thee once with sighs, by that strong death
Which made Thee once unbreathing—from the wrack
Themselves have called around them, call them back,
Back to Thee in continuous aspiration !

For here, O Lord,

For here they travel vainly, vainly pass

From city-pavement to untrodden sward

Where the lark finds her deep nest in the grass
Cold with the earth's last dew. Yea, very vain
The greatest speed of all these souls of men
Unless they travel upward to the throne
Where sittest THOU the satisfying ONE,
With help for sins and holy perfectings
For all requirements : while the archangel, raising
Unto Thy face his full ecstatic gazing,
Forgets the rush and rapture of his wings.

TO BETTINE,

THE CHILD-FRIEND OF GOETHE.

"I have the second sight, Goethe!"—*Letters of a Child.*

I

BETTINE, friend of Goethe,
Hadst thou the second sight—
 Upturning worship and delight
 With such a loving duty
 To his grand face, as women will,
 The childhood 'neath thine eyelids still?

II.

—Before his shrine to doom thee,
 Using the same child's smile
 That heaven and earth, beheld erewhile
 For the first time, won from thee
 Ere star and flower grew dim and dead
 Save at his feet and o'er his head?

III.

—Digging thine heart and throwing
Away its childhood's gold,
That so its woman-depth might hold
His spirit's overflowing?
(For surging souls, no worlds can bound,
Their channel in the heart have found.)

IV.

O child, to change appointed,
Thou hadst not second sight!
What eyes the future view aright
Unless by tears anointed?
Yea, only tears themselves can show
The burning ones that have to flow.

V.

O woman, deeply loving,
Thou hadst not second sight!
The star is very high and bright,
And none can see it moving.
Love looks around, below, above,
Yet all his prophecy is—love.

VI.

The bird thy childhood's playing
Sent onward o'er the sea,
Thy dove of hope came back to thee
Without a leaf: art laying
Its wet cold wing no sun can dry,
Still in thy bosom secretly?

VII.

Our Goethe's friend, Bettine,
I have the second sight!
The stone upon his grave is white,
The funeral stone between ye;
And in thy mirror thou hast viewed
Some change as hardly understood.

VIII.

Where's childhood? where is Goethe?
The tears are in thine eyes
Nay, thou shalt yet reorganize
Thy maidenhood of beauty
In his own glory, which is smooth
Of wrinkles and sublime in youth.

IX.

The poet's arms have wound thee,
He breathes upon thy brow,
He lifts thee upward in the glow
Of his great genius round thee,—
The childlike poet undefiled
Preserving evermore THE CHILD

MAN AND NATURE.

A SAD man on a summer day
 Did look upon the earth and say—

“ Purple cloud the hill-top binding ,
 Folded hills the valleys wind in ;
 Valleys with fresh streams among you ;
 Streams with bosky trees along you ;
 Trees with many birds and blossoms ;
 Birds with music-trembling bosoms ,
 Blossoms dropping dews that wreathe you
 To your fellow flowers beneath you ,
 Flowers that constellate on earth ;
 Earth that shakest to the mirth
 Of the merry Titan Ocean,
 All his shining hair in motion !
 Why am I thus the only one
 Who can be dark beneath the sun ? ”

But when the summer day was past,
 He looked to heaven and smiled at last,

Self-answered so --

“Because, O cloud,
Pressing with thy crumpled shroud
Heavily on mountain top,—
Hills that almost seem to drop
Stricken with a misty death
To the valleys underneath,—
Valleys sighing with the torrent,—
Waters streaked with branches horrent,—
Branchless trees that shake your head
Wildly o’er your blossoms spread
Where the common flowers are found,—
Flowers with foreheads to the ground,—
Ground that shrieketh while the sea
With his iron smiteth thee—
I am, besides, the only one
Who can be bright *without* the sun.”

A SEA-SIDE WALK.

I.

WE walked beside the sea
 After a day which perished silently
 Of its own glory—like the princess weird
 Who, combating the Genius, scorched and seared,
 Uttered with burning breath, “Ho! victory!”
 And sank adown, a heap of ashes pale:
 So runs the Arab tale.

II.

The sky above us showed
 A universal and unmoving cloud
 On which the cliffs permitted us to see
 Only the outline of their majesty,
 As master-minds when gazed at by the crowd:
 And shining with a gloom, the water grey
 Swang in its moon-taught way.

III.

Nor moon, nor stars were out ;
They did not dare to tread so soon about,
Though trembling, in the footsteps of the sun :
The light was neither night's nor day's, but one
Which, life-like, had a beauty in its doubt,
And silence's impassioned breathings round
Seemed wandering into sound

IV.

O solemn-beating heart
Of nature ! I have knowledge that thou art
Bound unto man's by cords he cannot sever ;
And, what time they are slackened by him ever,
So to attest his own supernal part,
Still runneth thy vibration fast and strong
The slackened cord along :

V.

For though we never spoke
Of the grey water and the shaded rock,
Dark wave and stone unconsciously were fused
Into the plaintive speaking that we used
Of absent friends and memories unforsook ;
And, had we seen each other's face, we had
Seen haply each was sad.

THE SEA-MEW

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO M. E. H.

I.

How joyously the young sea-mew
Lay dreaming on the waters blue
Whereon our little bark had thrown
A little shade, the only one,
But shadows ever man pursue.

II

Familiar with the waves and free
As if their own white foam were he,
His heart upon the heart of ocean
Lay learning all its mystic motion,
And throbbing to the throbbing sea.

III.

And such a brightness in his eye
As if the ocean and the sky

Within him had lit up and nurst
A soul God gave him not at first,
To comprehend their majesty.

IV

We were not cruel, yet did sunder
His white wing from the blue waves under,
And bound it, while his fearless eyes
Shone up to ours in calm surprise,
As deeming us some ocean wonder

V.

We bore our ocean bird unto
A grassy place where he might view
The flowers that curtsey to the bees,
The waving of the tall green trees,
The falling of the silver dew

VI

But flowers of earth were pale to him
Who had seen the rainbow fishes swim;
And when earth's dew around him lay
He thought of ocean's wingèd spray,
And his eye waxèd sad and dim.

VII.

The green trees round him only made
A prison with their darksome shade ,
And drooped his wing, and mournèd he
For his own boundless glittering sea—
Albeit he knew not they could fade.

VIII.

Then One her gladsome face did bring,
Her gentle voice's murmuring,
In ocean's stead his heart to move
And teach him what was human love :
He thought it a strange, mournful thing.

IX.

He lay down in his grief to die,
(First looking to the sea-like sky
That hath no waves) because, alas !
Our human touch did on him pass,
And, with our touch, our agony.

FELICIA HEMANS

TO L. E. L.,

REFERRING TO HER MONODY ON THE POETESS

I.

THOU bay-crowned living One that o'er the bay-crowned
 Dead art bowing,
 And o'er the shadeless moveless brow the vital shadow
 throwing,
 And o'er the sighless songless lips the wail and music
 wedding,
 And dropping o'er the tranquil eyes the tears not of their
 shedding!—

II.

Take music from the silent Dead whose meaning is
 completer,
 Reserve thy tears for living brows where all such tears
 are meeter,
 And leave the violets in the grass to brighten where thou
 treadest,
 No flowers for her! no need of flowers, albeit "bring
 flowers!" thou saidest.

III

Yes, flowers, to crown the "cup and lute," since both may
 come to breaking,
Or flowers, to greet the "bride"—the heart's own beating
 works its aching ;
Or flowers, to soothe the "captive's" sight, from earth's
 free bosom gathered,
Reminding of his earthly hope, then withering as it
 withered

IV.

But bring not near the solemn corse a type of human
 seeming,
Lay only dust's stern verity upon the dust undreaming
And while the calm perpetual stars shall look upon it solely,
Her spherèd soul shall look on *them* with eyes more
 bright and holy.

V

Nor mourn, O living One, because her part in life was
 mourning
Would she have lost the poet's fire for anguish of the
 burning?
The minstrel harp, for the strained string? the tripod, for
 the afflated
Woe? or the vision, for those tears in which it shone
 dilated?

VI.

Perhaps she shuddered while the world's cold hand her
brow was wreathing,
But never wronged that mystic breath which breathed in
all her breathing,
Which drew, from rocky earth and man, abstractions high
and moving,
Beauty, if not the beautiful, and love, if not the loving

VII.

Such visionings have paled in sight; the Saviour she
descrieth,
And little recks *who* wreathed the brow which on His
bosom lieth:
The whiteness of His innocence o'er all her garments,
flowing,
There learneth she the sweet "new song" she will not
mourn in knowing

VIII

Be happy, crowned and living One! and as thy dust
decayeth
May thine own England say for thee what now for Her
it sayeth—
"Albeit softly in our ears her silver song was ringing,
The foot-fall of her parting soul is softer than her singing."

L. E. L.'S LAST QUESTION.

“Do you think of me as I think of you?”

(From her poem written during the voyage to)

I.

“Do you think of me as I think of you,
My friends, my friends?”—She said it from the
The English minstrel in her minstrelsy,
While, under brighter skies than erst she knew
Her heart grew dark, and groped there as the
To reach across the waves friends left behind
“Do you think of me as I think of you?”

II.

It seemed not much to ask—“as *I* of *you*?”
We all do ask the same; no eyelids cover
Within the meekest eyes that question over:
And little in the world the Loving do
But sit (among the rocks?) and listen for
The echo of their own love evermore—
“Do you think of me as I think of you?”

III.

Love-learnèd she had sung of love and love,—
And like a child that, sleeping with dropt head
Upon the fairy-book he lately read,
Whatever household noises round him move,
Hears in his dream some elfin turbulence,—
Even so suggestive to her inward sense,
All sounds of life assumed one tune of love.

IV.

And when the glory of her dream withdrew,
When knightly gestes and courtly pageantries
Were broken in her visionary eyes
By tears the solemn seas attested true,—
Forgetting that sweet lute beside her hand,
She asked not,—“Do you praise me, O my land?”
But,—“Think ye of me, friends, as I of you?”

V.

Hers was the hand that played for many a year
Love's silver phrase for England, smooth and well.
Would God her heart's more inward oracle
In that lone moment might confirm her dear !
For when her questioned friends in agony
Made passionate response, “We think of thee,”
Her place was in the dust, too deep to hear.

VI.

Could she not wait to catch their answering
 Was she content, content with ocean's sound
 Which dashed its mocking infinite around
 One thirsty for a little love?—beneath
 Those stars content, where last her song had
 They mute and cold in radiant life, as soon
 Their singer was to be, in darksome death?

VII.

Bring your vain answers—cry, “We think of
 How think ye of her? warm in long ago
 Delights? or crowned with budding bays?
 None smile and none are crowned where lie
 With all her visions unfulfilled save one,
 Her childhood’s, of the palm-trees in the sun
 And lo! their shadow on her sepulchre!

VIII.

“Do ye think of me as I think of you?”—
 O friends, O kindred, O dear brotherhood
 Of all the world! what are we that we should
 For covenants of long affection sue?
 Why press so near each other when the touch
 Is barred by graves? Not much, and yet too
 Is this “Think of me as I think of you.”

* Her lyric on the Polar Star came home with her latest.